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**White
Chocolate
Taste Test**

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**THE SECRET
TO HEAVENLY
TEMPURA**

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White Chocolate-
Macadamia
Nut Cookies
See [page 49](#) for
a recipe

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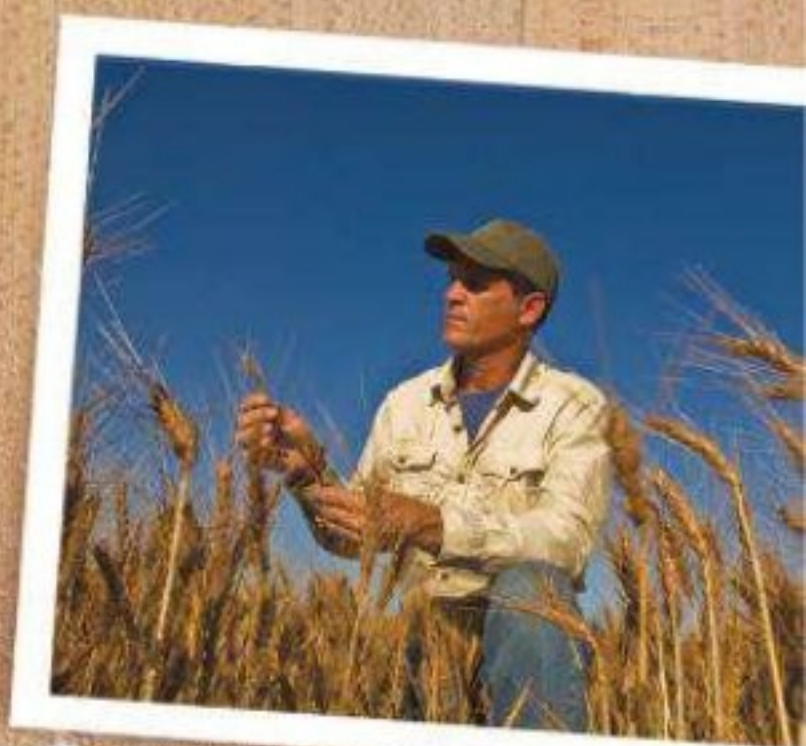


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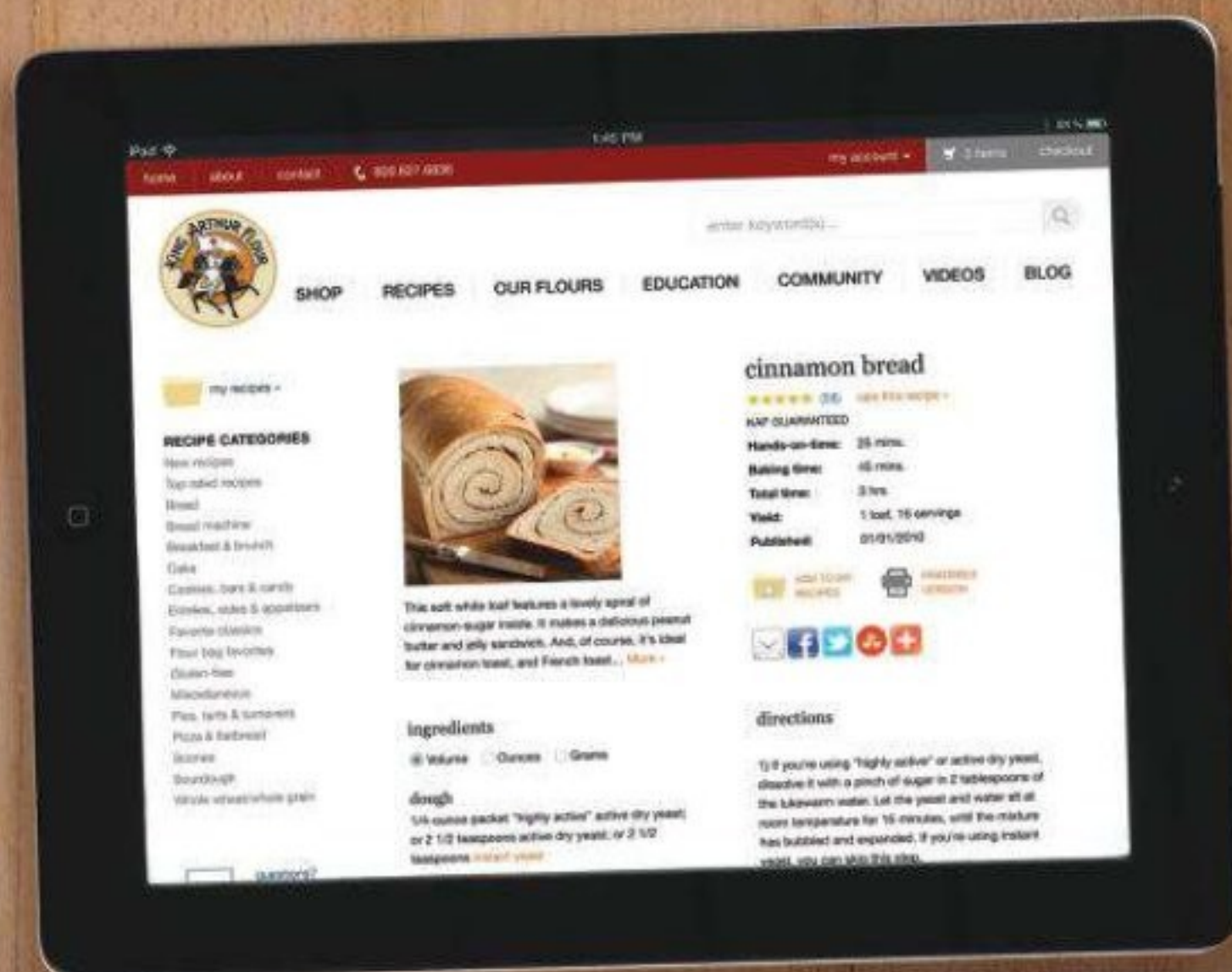
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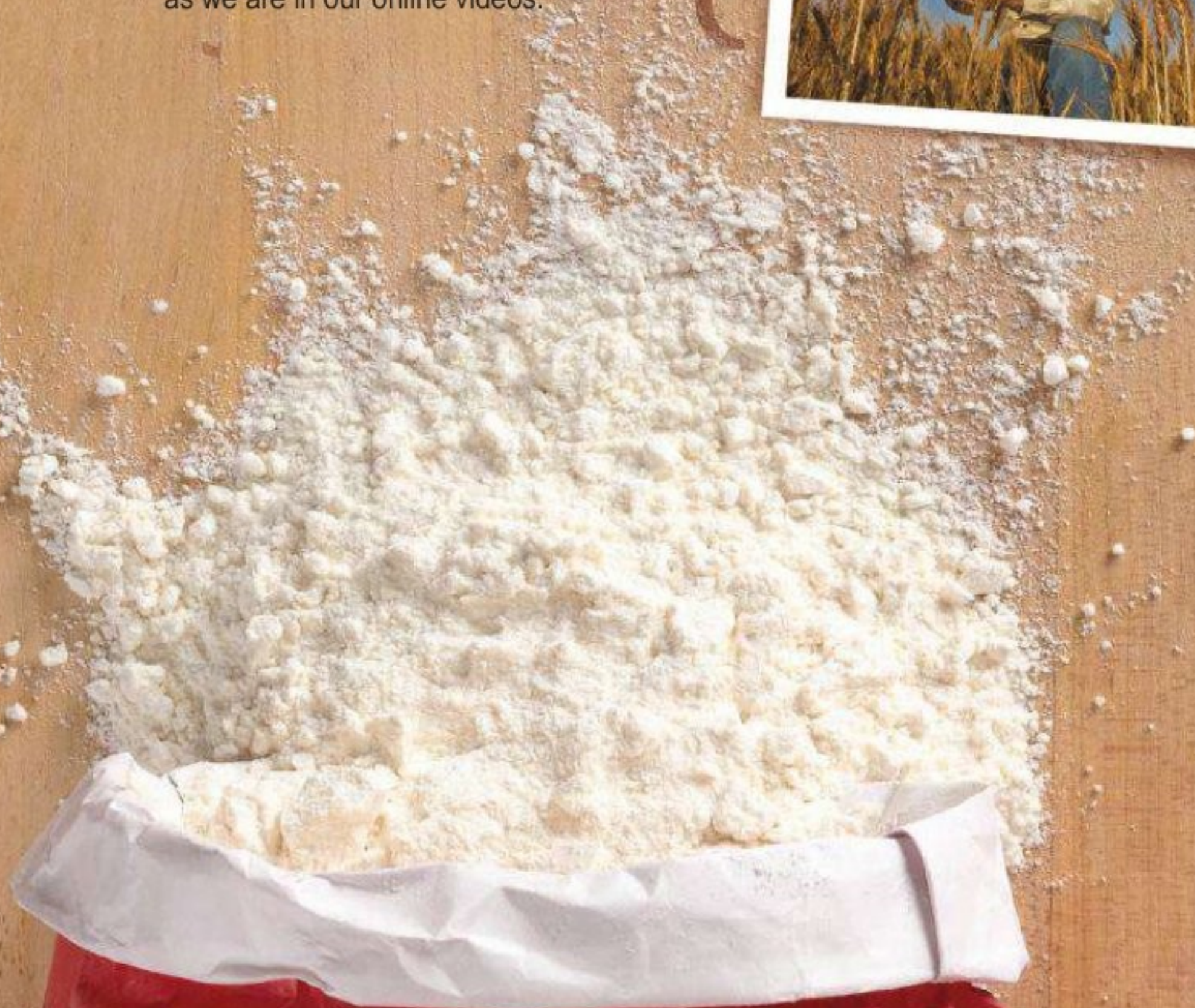
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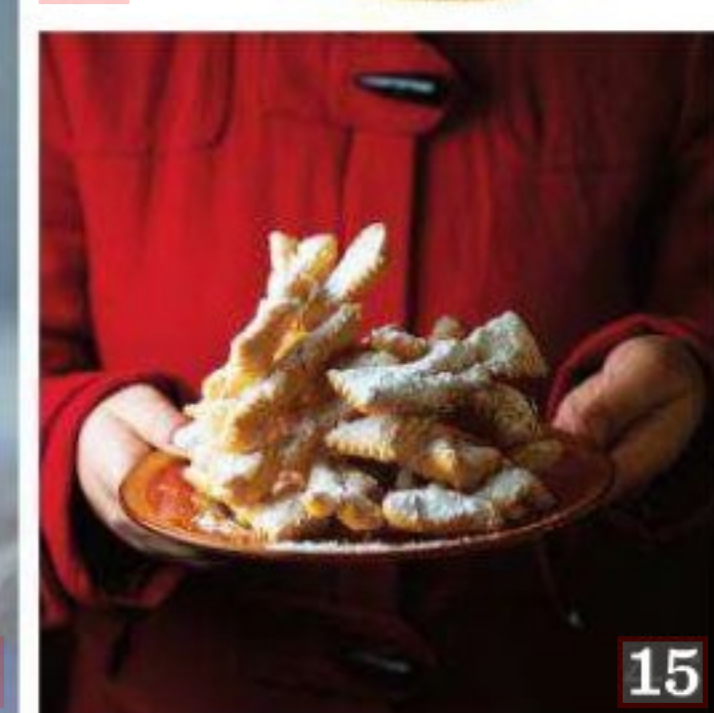
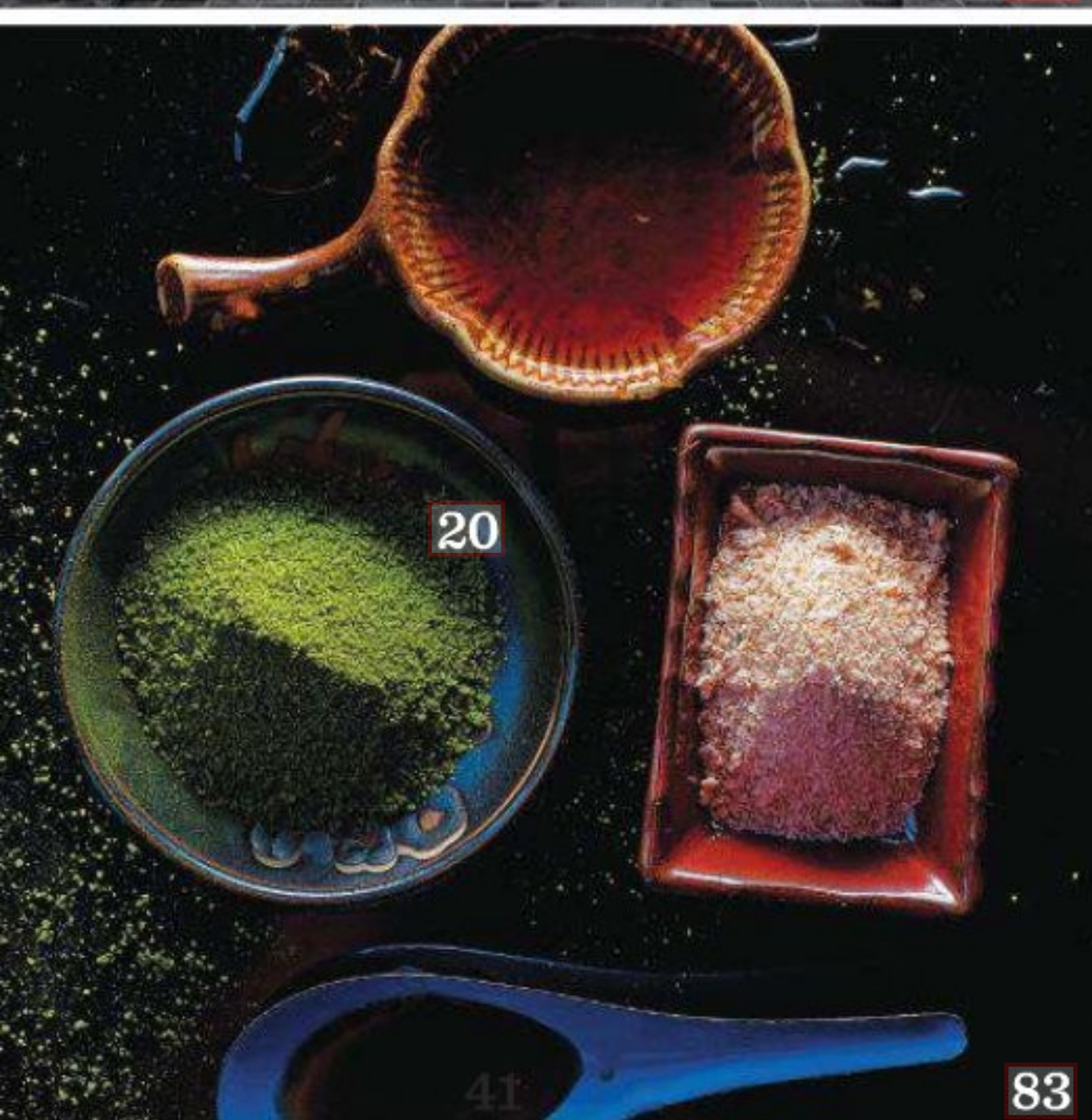
50 **Bavarian Dream** Longing for the unparalleled Christmases of his youth, the author returns to his childhood home in Bavaria, Germany. He finds the holiday, with its winter markets, spice cookies, generous dishes such as bacon-wrapped pork with giant dumplings, and camaraderie, just as he left it. *By Todd Coleman*

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Cover *White Chocolate-Macadamia Nut Cookies* PHOTOGRAPH BY TODD COLEMAN

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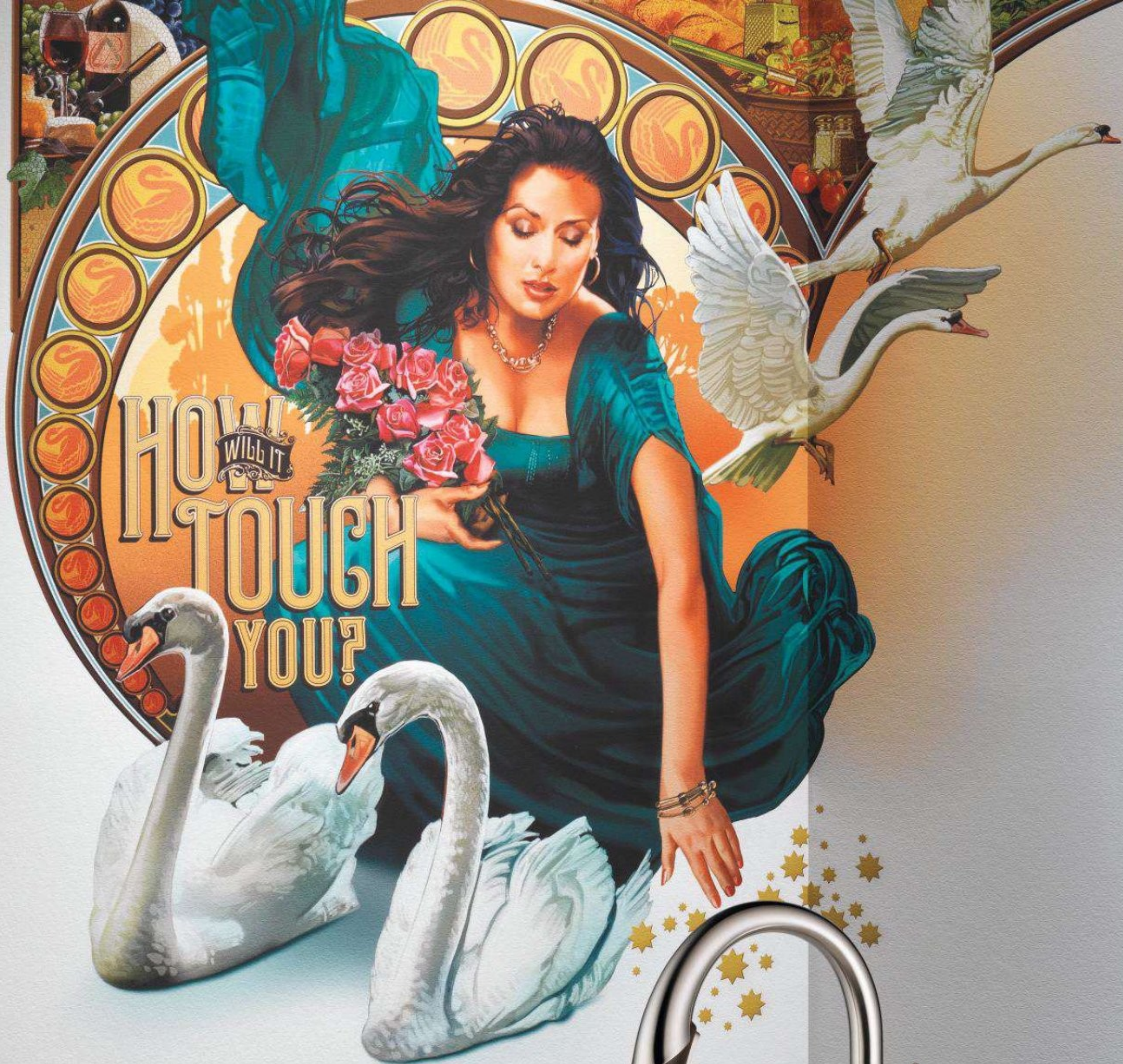
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Publication Agreement Number: 40612608

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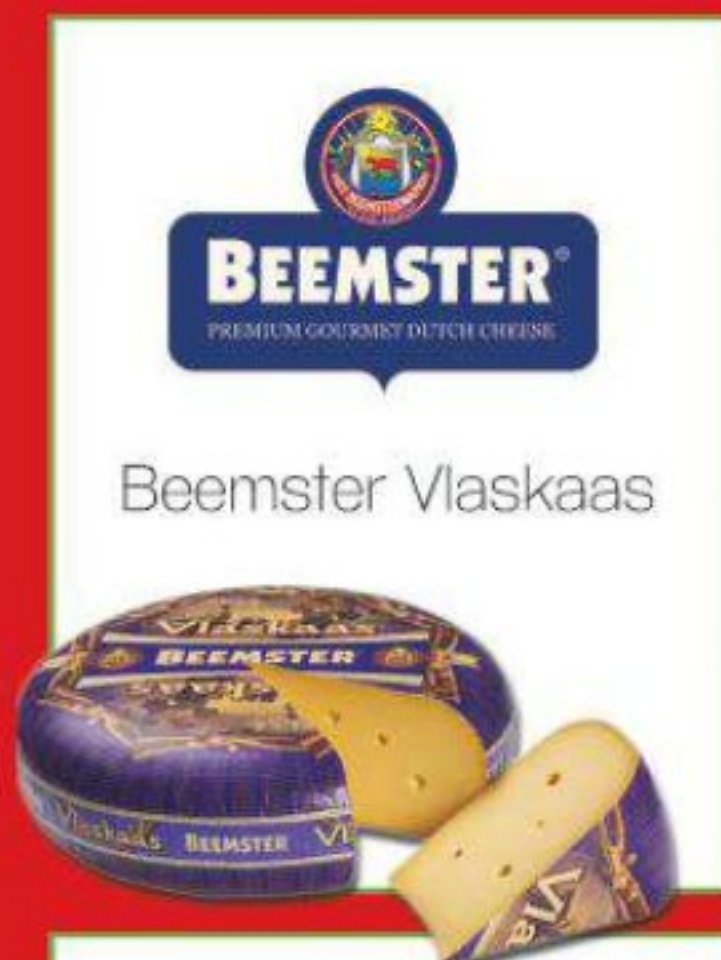
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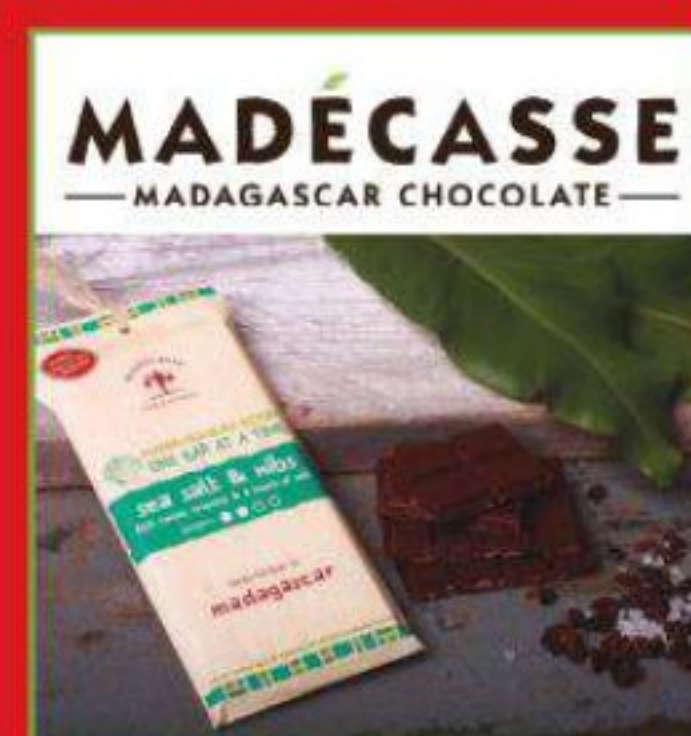


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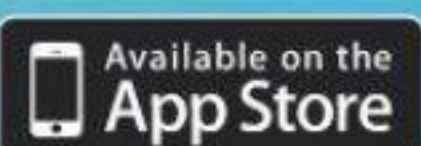
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FIRST



Sweet Tidings

The season's greatest joys emerge warm from the oven

THE HOLIDAYS START EARLY in the SAVEUR test kitchen. In August, we begin working on our Christmas stories. As the resident baker, I've tested all the pastry, gotten elbow deep in chocolate, crushed peppermint into dust, and applied a rainbow of sanding sugars and glazes to cookies by Labor Day.

In the real world, I step it up in November. Intensive holiday baking has been a part of my life since I was old enough to stir eggs and sugar together for tea cakes, the very first sweets I ever made. Glazed with white icing and sprinkled with red and green sprinkles, these vanilla- and almond-scented treats became an instant Christmas standard, and I, in turn, was christened the family baker.

By the time I was a teenager, I was put in charge of the meal proper. But I still kept up dessert duties. Pecan pie, coconut layer cake, and, always, cookies: shortbread filled with bittersweet chocolate and ringed with salted nuts; caramel-filled chocolate thumbprints; and, best of all, cranberry-pistachio biscotti dipped into white chocolate—I loved mak-

ing them, and my family adored eating them.

While researching "Beyond the Pale" on [page 41](#), I often thought back to those decadent biscotti and how their white chocolate coating lent them a holiday allure. The confection's snowy hue and smooth-as-ice texture make it a wonderful, wintery palette for colored sugars, and it adds a creamy sweetness when folded into fluffy mousse or broken into chunks for cookies. That's why I like to work with it especially this time of year, when the hours I spend in the kitchen creating something special come back to me tenfold in appreciation.

As much as I enjoy whipping high-peaked meringues and forming star-shaped shortbreads, I've known since I was a child that the true reward of baking is seeing my loved ones' pleasure when I present them with a tray of treats, like the German cookies pictured on [page 59](#), or the macadamia nut ones on [page 49](#). If you're not a baker yet, or even if you're an old hand, I invite you to try these recipes; you'll see what I mean in the smiles on your friends' and relatives' faces. —BEN MIMS, Associate Food Editor

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FARE

Rituals and Reminiscences From the World of Food, Plus Agenda and More



Holiday Parade

In Baltimore, caroling and ancestral foods awaken a community's Polish past

LIKE 15,000 other Polish immigrants who arrived in Baltimore around the turn of the 20th century, my maternal great-grandparents, Jozef and Michalina Oleszcuk, ended up in the waterfront community of Fell's Point. Two decades later, 70 percent of the neighborhood's storefronts had Polish signs in their windows. Though she died before I was born, my grandmother tells me Michalina kept a larder stuffed with Polish foods. At the butcher on

Fleet Street, she bought live ducks, which she used to make a velvety sweet-and-sour soup called *czernina*. She shopped at stalls in Broadway Market for specialties like *krusciki*, bow-tie fritters dusted with powdered sugar.

By the 1950s, families like mine began leaving Fell's Point for the suburbs. St. Stanislaus Church, once a center for Polish culture, closed in 2000 because of shrinking membership. Last year, the summer

Polish Festival was canceled for the first time in 38 years.

But one tradition endures. On December 23, 1971, Polish-Americans began caroling on Fell's Point streets. Local deejay Frank Bittner started the annual event, known as East Baltimore Christmas, to gather old friends who had left the city.

Forty years later, I joined the carolers, a 33-year-old American woman aching for a connection to my Polish roots. From their seats on a wooden wagon pulled

by a pickup truck, a polka band led us in American and Polish Christmas songs. In front of the old Weber's Funeral Home, neighbors handed out cups of vodka. Krakus Deli offered links of kielbasa. A gift shop called Polish Treasures sold *paczki*, dense glazed doughnuts filled with raspberry jam.

The crowd paraded to the

Above, a platter of holiday *krusciki*, or Polish bow-tie fritters. (See [page 16](#) for a recipe.)

AGENDA

December 2012

December

1-6

FIESTAS DE QUITO

(Festival of Quito) Quito, Ecuador
Ecuador's capital becomes one big street party as Quiteños celebrate their city's birthday. After attending parades and bullfights, revelers indulge in *canelazo*, a drink made with cinnamon and *aguardiente* (a potent sugarcane distillate), along with dishes such as *llapingachos* (cheese-stuffed potato patties) and *empanadas de morocho* (white corn fritters filled with ground meat). Info: quito.com.ec

December

2

Birthday

JEAN TROISGROS

1926, Chalon-sur-Saône, Burgundy
A father of nouvelle cuisine, Jean Troisgros and his younger brother, Pierre, turned their father's café north of Lyons into the influential Les Frères Troisgros in 1953. Troisgros' pure, simple flavors and exacting technique, expressed in signature dishes like *l'escalope de saumon à l'oseille* (salmon with sorrel sauce), earned the restaurant three Michelin stars and the Gault-Millau title of "Best Restaurant in the World" in 1972. The chef passed away in 1983, but his nephew, Michel, continues the family legacy.

December

8-9

MANJIMUP CHERRY HARMONY FESTIVAL

Manjimup, Australia

December is summertime in Australia, when this southwestern town fêtes its cherry harvest. Vendors offer the fruit in various forms, including cherry pizza. There's also a pit-spitting contest and live music. The festival culminates with a lunch featuring local crayfish, produce, and wine served at a 200-seat long picnic table nestled beneath the cherry trees. Info: cherryfestival.com.au

December

9

NEW WORLD CUISINE: THE HISTORIES OF CHOCOLATE, MATE Y MAS

Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe, New Mexico

The Old and New Worlds meet through this yearlong exhibit of 300 culinary items, from harvest implements to silverware. Farmers, Franciscans, seed-savers, and scholars are all players in this telling of the exchange of foods to and from the Americas, from the arrival >>

Polish Home Club, an old dance hall on Broadway, where the band took to the stage, and revelers ate oniony potato pierogies. Savoring a *krusciki* I pocketed along the way, I watched as family and friends grabbed each other's hands and danced to an upbeat polka. My great-grandparents felt very near. —Jennifer Walker

Krusciki

(Polish Bow-Tie Fritters)

MAKES ABOUT 2½ DOZEN

Also referred to as angel wings, these sugar-dusted fritters (pictured on page 15) are both crunchy and pillowy. They're often served at Polish weddings and holidays.

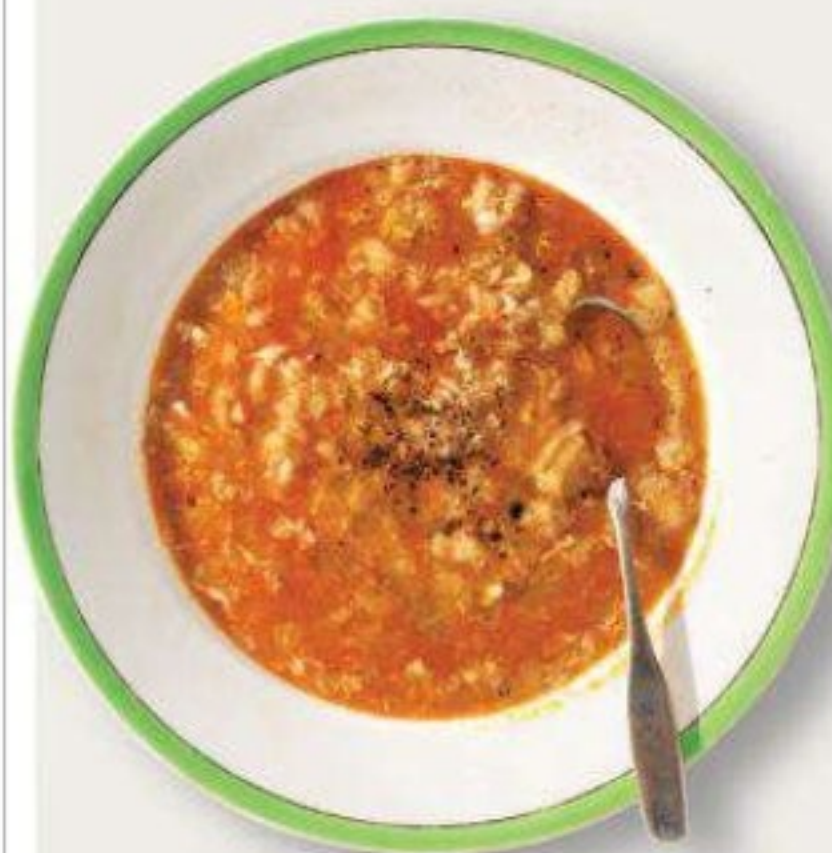
- 2 cups flour
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 3 egg yolks
- Canola oil, for frying
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1 Whisk together flour and salt in a large bowl, and form a well in the center; add sour cream, vanilla, and yolks, and slowly stir together until dough forms. Transfer to a floured work surface, and using a rolling pin, roll dough until ⅛" thick. Using a fluted pastry cutter, cut dough into 1"-wide strips, and then diagonally cut strips into 3"-long segments. Using a paring knife, cut a 1" slit lengthwise in the center of each segment, and thread one end of the segment through the hole and out the other side, pulling ends apart again to form a knot; set pastries aside.

2 Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. Dutch oven, and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Working in batches, add pastries, and fry, tossing in oil, until puffed and golden brown, about 2 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer pastries to paper towels to drain briefly, and then dust with sugar; serve immediately.

Feed a Fever

My favorite Indian food is *sabudana khichdi*, a mild tapioca dish. When I visit my friend Nisha, who is from New Delhi, it's what I ask her to cook. She doesn't get why I wouldn't rather eat something celebratory, like meaty *biriyani*. *Khichdi*, she says, is for when your nose is so stuffed that you can't taste. But the way I see it, because the foods we eat when we're sick are so comforting, they're also some of the most enticing. From starchy grains to aromatic broths, what we turn to at our worst are also great when we're at our best. Every cuisine seems to have its own version. —Sushma Subramanian



Devised by Castilian shepherds seeking warmth on cold winter nights, *sopa de ajo*, or garlic soup, made with chicken stock, day-old bread, sinus-clearing hot paprika, and plenty of the stinking rose, is said to awaken dulled senses. Perhaps that's why it's also touted as a hangover cure.



In Finland, wild summer berries are frozen for use in winter's *mustikkakeitto*, a warm, silky blueberry potage packed with vitamin C. "It's soothing for the throat. After drinking it, you curl back up and sleep the fever away," says Finnish cultural attaché Magdalena Herrgård.



"Pepper is for colds and coughs, and turmeric heals wounds," says cookbook author Viji Varadarajan. In his native South India, *milagu rasam*, a broth made with those key ingredients, also includes a dose of tamarind, which is believed to help heal sore throats.



When chef David Baziran of San Francisco's Fifth Floor restaurant feels a tickle in his throat, he soothes himself with *avgolemono*, a simple Mediterranean soup of eggs, lemons, and chicken broth. "It makes me feel better," he says, "and closer to my Armenian grandmother."



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>> of chocolate in Europe to Thai cooks' embrace of chiles, and more. Info: internationalfolkart.org

December

23

TOM BAWCOCK'S EVE

Mousehole, Cornwall, England

When winter storms left 16th-century residents of this seaside town facing famine, seaman Tom Bawcock braved the swells to bring back fish, which were baked into a pie for all to enjoy. "Stargazy pie," featuring a ring of fish heads poking through the crust looking skyward, is still served annually at Mousehole's waterfront Ship Inn, while carolers carry paper lanterns to the harbor, which is illuminated by holiday lights. Info: cornwall-online.co.uk

December

28

Anniversary

1930, MANIFESTO DELLA CUCINA FUTURISTA

1930, Turin, Italy

Poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's *Manifesto della Cucina Futurista* (Manifesto on Futurist Cooking) called for a new cuisine in line with the forward-looking Futurist movement he founded. It decried pasta ("the enemy of speed and modernity") and traditional flavors, extolling bitter and sour tastes and striking contrasts between sweet and savory. In 1931, Marinetti applied his ideas to a dinner featuring dishes like "excited pig" (salami cooked in espresso with an eau de cologne sauce).

December

28

Anniversary

PREMIERE OF FIRST FOOD FILM

1895, Paris, France

It was 117 years ago that brothers Auguste and Louis Lumière exhibited a set of short films at the Salon Indien of the Grand Café in Paris. Among them was *Repas de Bébé* (Baby's Meal), a 41-second recording of Auguste and his wife, Marguerite, feeding porridge to their infant daughter, Andrée. Gastro-nomic films owe their roots to this tiny masterpiece, which depicts the primal relationship between food and family.

December

28-29

FESTA SAGRA DELLA ZEPPOLA

(Festival of the Zeppola Feast)

Positano, Italy

Fans of the anise-laced fritter known as zeppola gather in Positano on Italy's Amalfi coast, where cooks compete for the coveted Zeppola d'Oro medal. Other prizes include those for the best dough and the most interesting plating. Guests can burn calories afterward with treasure hunts, dancing, and a village-wide tug-of-war competition. Info: festadellazeppola.com



Midnight Snack

The Iranian winter solstice is fortified by fruits and nuts

As an American of Iranian descent born and raised in New York City, my childhood simply gestured toward my Iranian heritage—until my cousin Shahnaz moved here with her student husband. Suddenly we were part of a flourishing Iranian community that held weekly parties in crowded apartments. *Shab-e-Yalda*, the winter solstice, marked the apex of these gatherings. Since ancient times, celebrants have stayed up till dawn, eating and telling stories to keep vigilant against the evil they believed

lurks in the dark during the longest night of the year. We followed suit.

When the Iranian Revolution erupted in 1979, the tension embodied in the Yalda ritual came to the fore. That solstice, the adults' conversations were heated, and they relieved their stress by chomping on *ajil*, a holiday trail mix of salted chickpeas and pistachios, sugar-coated and rose-water-perfumed almonds, dried fruits, and, most notably, pumpkin seeds. They cracked each shell, pulling out the nutty seed using only their teeth.

In the 33 years that have passed, the tension has become a wary ache. Now my daughter dozes on my lap as the adults talk through the Yalda night. We try not to focus on global politics and instead recite Rumi and

Hafez poems. Often, a musician among us sings American or Iranian songs. Always, we munch on *ajil*. None of us have mastered our parents' method of splitting the pumpkin shells, but like them, we wait for those rays of first light, looking forward to a different tomorrow. —Ramin Ganeshram



Ajil

(Persian Trail Mix)

MAKES ABOUT 5 CUPS

This traditional Iranian mixture of nuts, seeds, and dried fruits is a staple of winter solstice celebrations.

- 1 cup roasted, salted pumpkin seeds
- 1 cup whole, salted pistachios
- 1 cup sugar-coated slivered almonds (see [page 92](#))
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup dried mulberries (see [page 92](#))
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup roasted, unsalted almonds
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried, salted chickpeas
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup golden raisins
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup dried currants
- 8 dried Mission figs
- 8 dried Turkish figs

Stir together all ingredients in a bowl until evenly combined; store in an airtight container for up to 2 weeks.



On [Saveur.com](#)

THE GIVING SEASON

It happens to all of us: The holidays creep up, and suddenly we're scrambling for the perfect presents. To help you avoid this mad dash, the editors of *SAVEUR* have curated dozens of gifts that will help their recipients cook and eat more splendidly in the coming year. At [SAVEUR.COM/GIFTGUIDE](#), you can find oven-to-table enamel baking dishes and other essential cookware; tabletop items like Dutch cheese knives and crystal glasses in brilliant colors; festive spirits in decorative bottles; stocking stuffers such as birch bark-patterned straws; and much more. We've even included recipes for edible gifts, like mulled-cider syrup and ginger-curry candied almonds. Though it may be better to give than receive, we're guessing you'll find something among our choices for yourself, too. —Cory Baldwin

Whatever the Cuisine

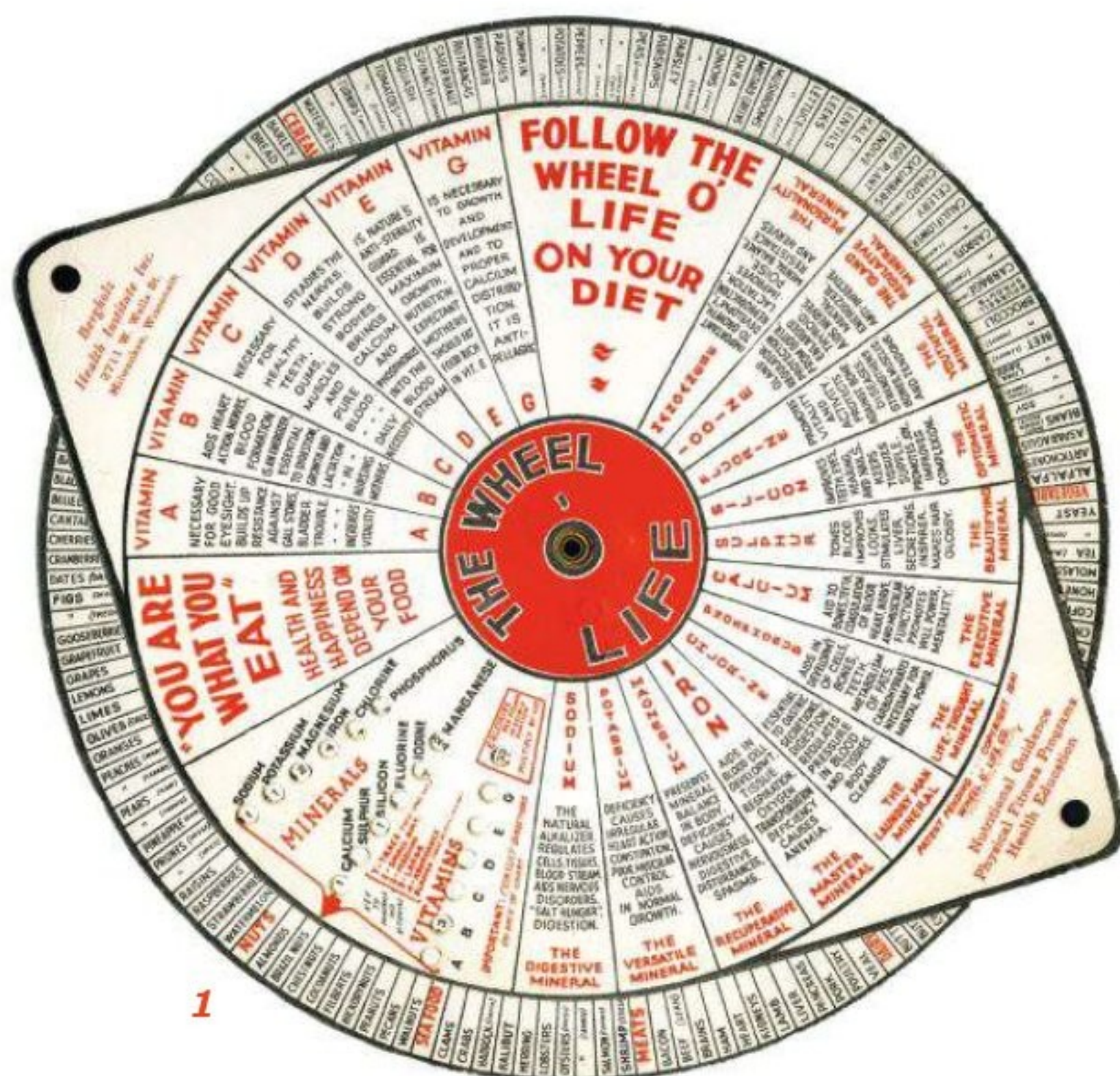


Côtes du Rhône **Wines**



Always Right





Meals on Wheels Twenty years ago, my father gave me my first paper wheel chart. An information-rich rotating nutrition guide marketed to physicians and druggists in the 1940s, it was dubbed **1. The Wheel o' Life**. I loved its bold design, neat functionality, and kitschy terminology (phosphorus was labeled "the life-thought mineral"; chlorine, "the laundry man mineral"). It wasn't long before I became an avid collector of other such charts. The computers of their day, volvelles, as they're called, originated in medieval manuscripts as tools for representing data.

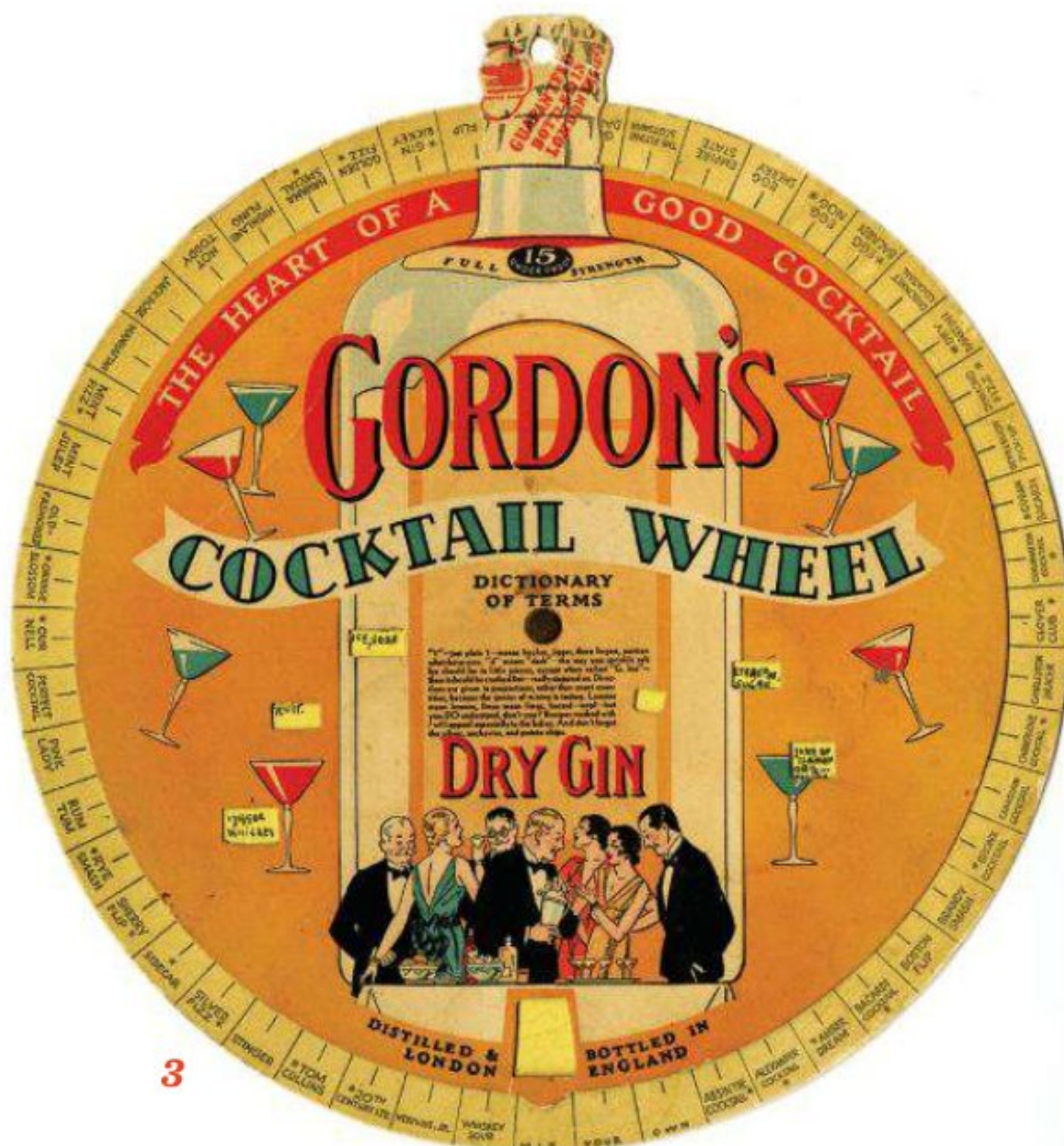
By the early 20th century, wheel charts had begun their migration from the utilitarian (as maps, calculators, and scientific devices) to the everyday, which included dinner. To advertise its refrigerators with circular "rollator" compressors, the Norge refrigerator company created the similarly shaped **2. Rollator Recipe Chart**, a 1933 guide to chilly dishes like jellied chicken bouillon and peppermint candy ice cream. Post-Prohibition, home bar aides like the **3. Gordon's Cocktail Wheel** were on the rise. Often sponsored by distillers, they included recipes for martinis and other classics



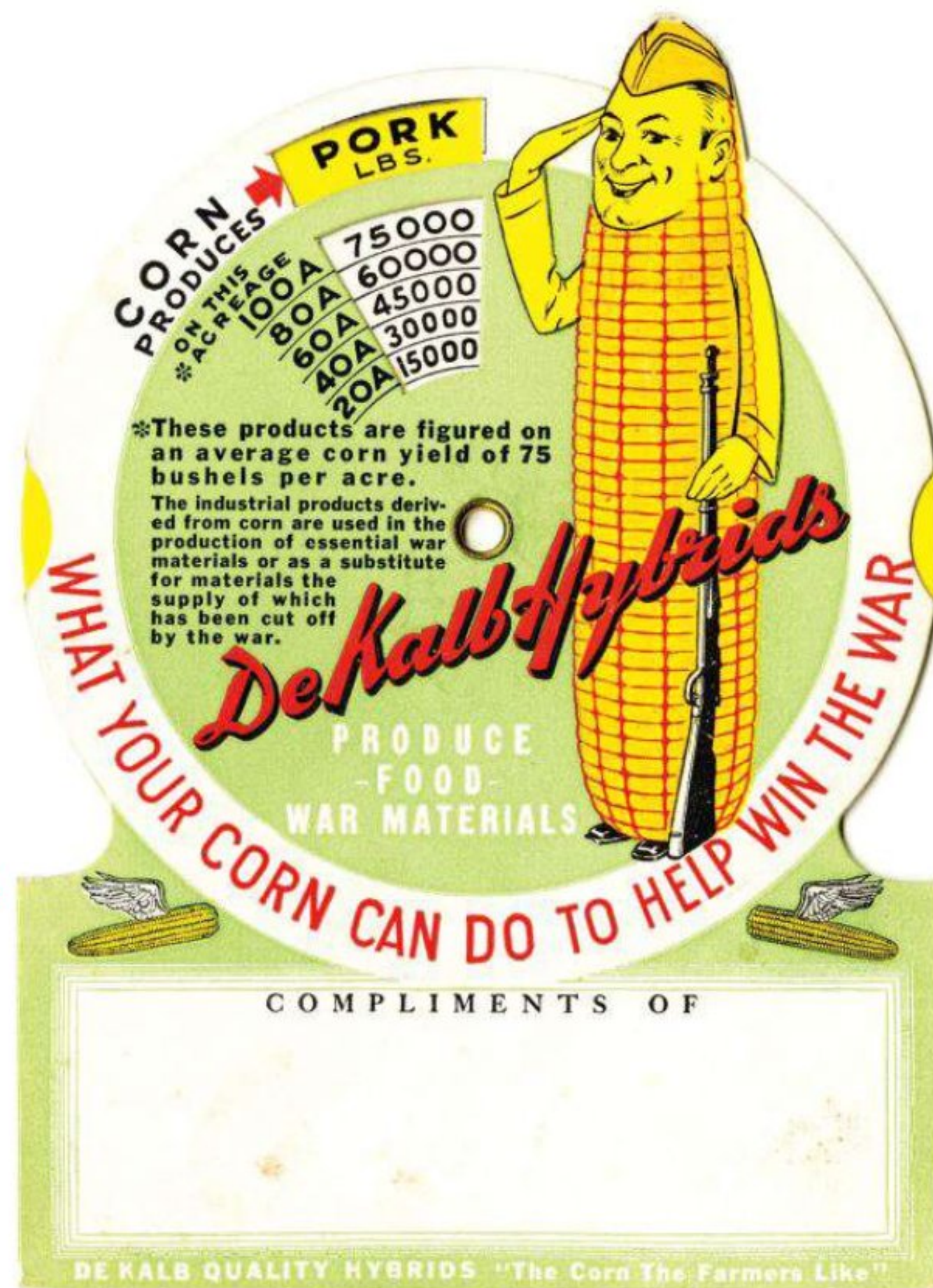
Shared stories over firsts.

Laughed over seconds.

Saved the best for last.



3



4

along with such rarities as the egg sherry. During World War II, the seed company DeKalb Hybrids produced the patriotic **4. What Your Corn Can Do to Help Win the War**. The chart provided a quantifiable inventory of corn products, from lard and butter to rubber and glycerol, overseen by a corn soldier reporting for duty on the farm. As I realized when researching my book, *Reinventing the Wheel* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2002), these volvelles are more than culinary curiosities; they are beacons of social history, telling us what people ate, drank, and cared about. —Jessica Helfand

VOLVELLE COLLECTION, ROBERT B. HAAS FAMILY ARTS LIBRARY, YALE



And it all started with warm McCormick® Gourmet Collection Roasted Saigon Cinnamon.

McCormick Gourmet Collection Molten Spiced Chocolate Cabernet Cakes

Ingredients	4 oz. semi-sweet baking chocolate	1 tsp. Pure Vanilla Extract	6 tbsp. flour
	1/2 cup (1 stick) butter	1 cup confectioners' sugar	1/4 tsp. Saigon Cinnamon or Roasted Saigon Cinnamon
Directions	1 tbsp. Cabernet Sauvignon or other red wine	2 eggs	1/4 tsp. Ground Ginger
		1 egg yolk	1/8 tsp. Ground Cloves (optional)

MICROWAVE chocolate and butter in large microwavable bowl on HIGH 1 minute or until butter is melted. Stir with wire whisk until chocolate is completely melted. Stir in wine, vanilla and sugar until well blended. Stir in eggs and yolk. Stir in flour and spices. Pour batter evenly into 4 (6 oz.) buttered custard cups or soufflé dishes. Place on baking sheet.

BAKE in preheated 425°F oven 13 to 15 minutes or until sides are firm but centers are soft. Let stand 1 minute. Carefully loosen edges with knife. Invert onto serving plates. Sprinkle with additional confectioners' sugar. Serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.

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Season's Readings

Our take on some of the best cookbooks of 2012

Modernist Cuisine at Home

Nathan Myhrvold with Maxime Bilet (The Cooking Lab, 2012, \$140) Much of the focus on Nathan Myhrvold is directed at his NASA-level gadgetry. But this follow-up to 2011's *Modernist Cuisine* proves that he's not just a biochemistry buff; he's in pursuit of culinary perfection. Thoughtful recipes call on scientific principles to produce precise results in dishes as surprising as a strawberry marinara sauce, and as accessible as a mac and cheese. —Helen Rosner

Fäviken Magnus Nilsson (Phaidon, 2012, \$50) If the grocer gives you the stink-eye when you demand “three perfectly shot and matured hazel hens,” then you’ve fallen for *Fäviken*. We don’t blame you. Magnus Nilsson has written a book that speaks to the forager’s fantasy he creates at his restaurant, Fäviken Magasinet, located on a Swedish farm and hunting estate. Filled with tips on fermenting and grilling over juniper branches, it may not offer the most practical advice, but it will make you look twice at the beauty around you. —Hugh Acheson

Wine Grapes: A Complete Guide to 1,368 Vine Varieties, Including Their Origins and Flavors

Jancis Robinson, Julia Harding, and José Vouillamoz (Ecco, 2012, \$175) Can

a combination of geography, botany, and history explain why you love chardonnay? British wine critic Jancis Robinson and her co-authors offer answers to this and hundreds of other grape-related questions in this thick book, which details the histories, and family trees of every variety, from albariño to zinfandel. The trusty guide will inspire novel wine matchups for favorite recipes. —David Lincoln Ross

Canal House Cooks Every Day

Christopher Hirsheimer and Melissa Hamilton (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2012, \$45) Former SAVEUR editors Hirsheimer and Hamilton appear to lead the lives most home cooks long for. Their kitchen is in an old New Jersey canal house, where every day they meet to turn local ingredients into gorgeous meals. Their recipes are easy, folksy, and, sometimes, imprecise. But the rewards are many. Their pastry dough turned me, never before a baker, into someone who whips up apple galettes and gianduja-caramel tarts. —Betsy Andrews

Jerusalem: A Cookbook Yotam Ottolenghi, Sami Tamimi (Ten Speed Press, 2012, \$35) Sami Tamimi hails from Jerusalem’s Muslim east, Yotam Ottolenghi from its Jewish west. Celebrating their complicated city, the partners in London’s Ottolenghi restaurants have filled this book with images of urban life

and recipes representing the city’s polyglot flavors, from Palestinian lamb-and-veal *kofita* to *krantz*, a German-Jewish chocolate cake. But it’s the book’s personal approach that imparts it with a sense of yearning that goes far beyond hunger. —Gabriella Gershenson

The Great Meat Cookbook

Bruce Aidells with Anne-Marie Ramo (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012, \$40) As the title suggests, this book is nearly the last word on meats, from goat to bison to basic ground chuck. Recipes showcase the versatility of the star ingredient, kicking off with a steak-house rib eye, then moving on to global fare like Mexican tongue tacos and seasonal gems like pork stew with hard cider. Bruce Aidells, owner of Aidells Sausage Company in San Leandro, California, plays the role of butcher-advisor, offering at-a-glance references to cuts and passages on sustainability. —Keith Pandolfi

Japanese Farm Food

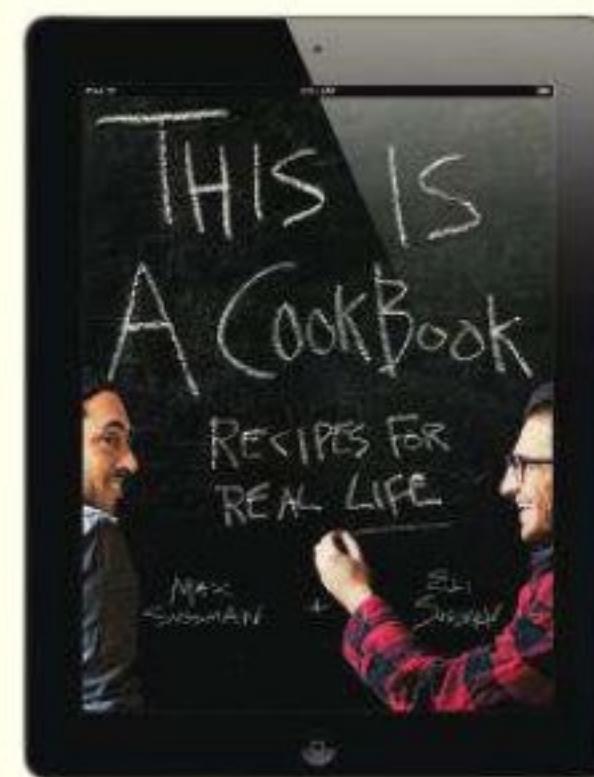
Nancy Singleton Hachisu (Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2012, \$35) This cookbook by a Californian who moved to Japan 23 years ago to marry an egg farmer is centered on what she cooks at home. It’s full of everyday country dishes, such as *tamago no shoyuzuke* (eggs pickled in soy sauce) and *niku-jaga* (potatoes, noodles, and pork belly in a ginger-and-onion broth), that are uncomplicated yet deeply satisfying. Essays on the author’s years in Japan and lush photos make the book as great a pleasure to peruse as it is to cook from. —Karen Shimizu

A Girl and Her Pig

April Bloomfield with JJ Goode (HarperCollins Publishers, 2012, \$29.99) In her first book, Bloomfield, chef-owner of several Manhattan restaurants, including its first gastropub, The Spotted Pig, lets you in on her British upbringing, displaying the same enthusiasm for her grandfather’s porridge as she does for chef-y

Digital Feast

Filled with video clips, cooking playlists, and Instagram-style step-by-steps, *This Is a Cookbook* (Weldon Owen, 2012) is one of the year’s most cleverly interactive ebooks. Written by brothers Max and Eli Sussman—veterans of Brooklyn’s zeitgeisty restaurant scene—the ebook’s smart design and colorful storytelling draw you in. But you’ll stay for unpretentious, appealing recipes like gooey Nutella breakfast rolls and a pesto-dressed meatball sub. It’s serious food that appeals to the not-so-serious eater in all of us. —Helen Rosner



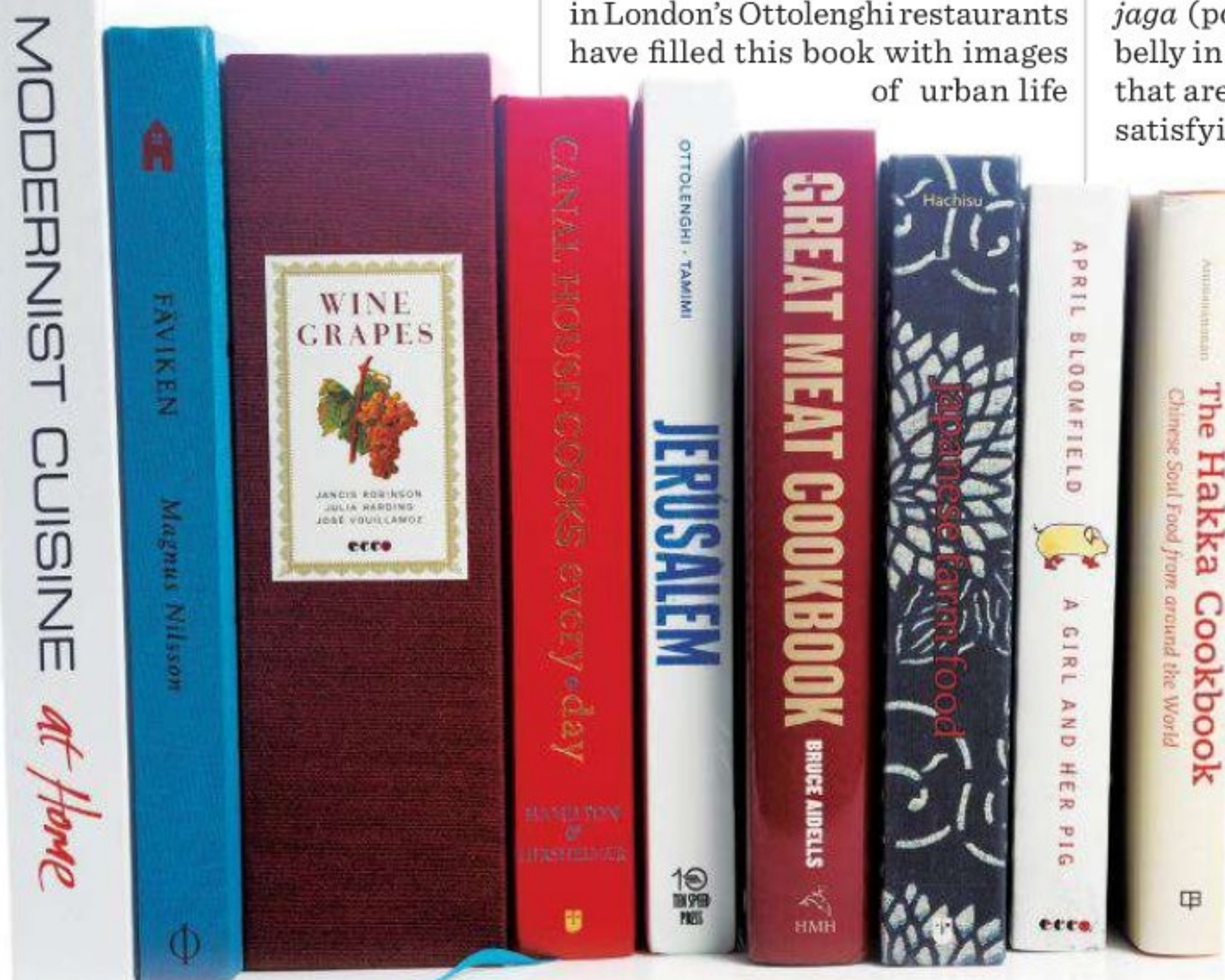
dishes like ramp-butter toasts with fried quail eggs. A sense of play comes through in the conversational recipes, fanciful illustrations, and musings, including a convincing argument for giving offal a try. —Kellie Evans

The Hakka Cookbook

Linda Lau Anusasananan (University of California Press, 2012, \$39.95) Starting in her grandmother’s kitchen, the author traces the culinary roots of the Hakka people, who were forced from China’s Henan Province by invaders in 317 and have been part of a global diaspora ever since. Her recipes reveal how Hakka dishes have absorbed the flavors around them, from Jamaica, where Scotch bonnet peppers are added to soup noodles, to Peru, where yucca is substituted for taro in a steamed pork dish. —Lillian Chou

THE PANTRY, page 92: Information on participating in East Baltimore Christmas, and more.

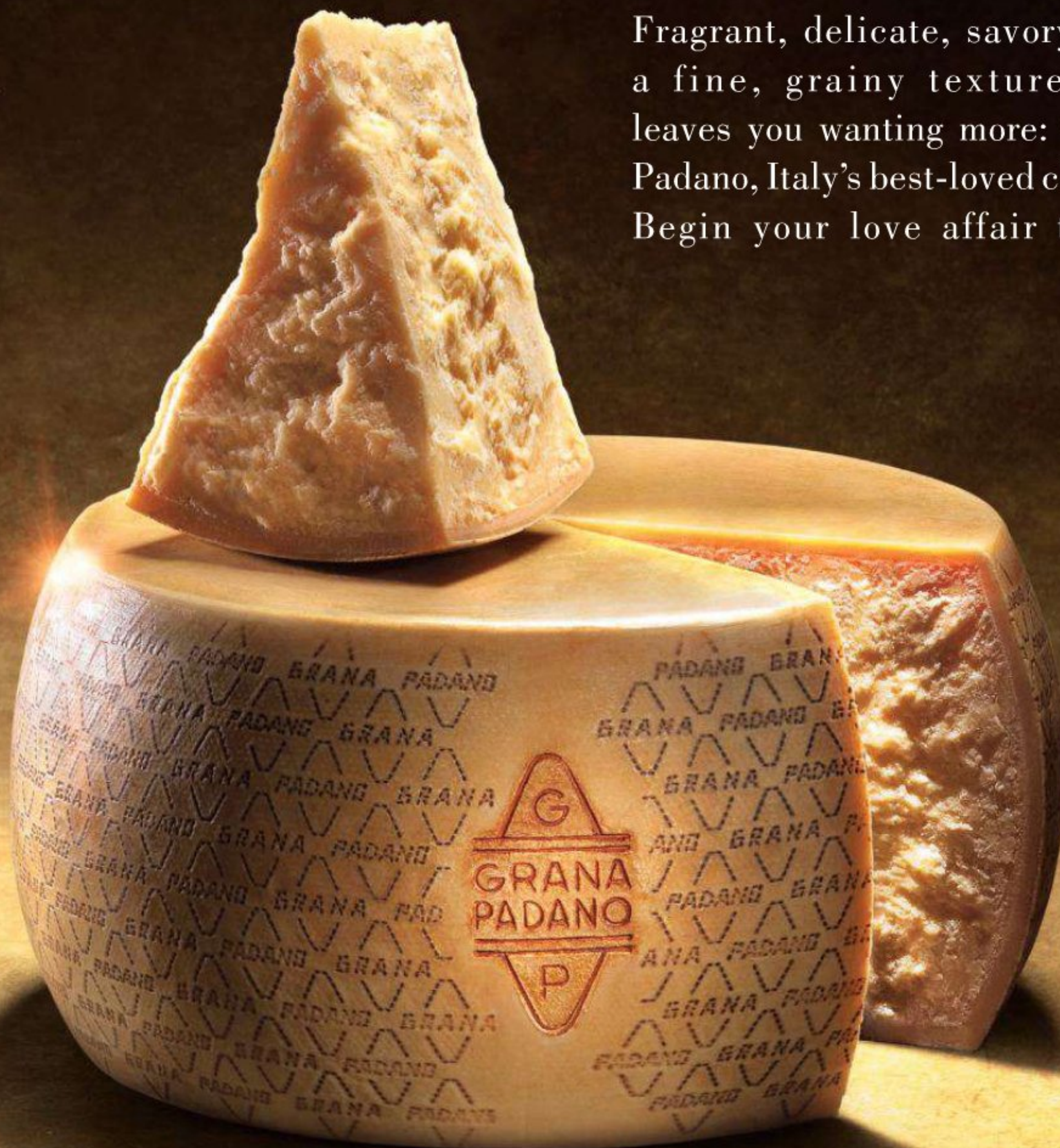
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ESSAY

My Spanish Sanctuary

A traveler heals a broken heart in the ancient market of Cádiz

BY ALEXANDER LOBRANO

EVERY MORNING, THE CITY'S briny air made me wince when I woke, because it smelled so much like sex does after a swim in the sea. It also pickled my pain, as did the stubby snifter of Fundador brandy I downed every night after dinner, the reason why the scouring white sunlight of those summer mornings was too bright for me. So, after bracing myself with several shot glasses of harsh black coffee and a saucer of sugary churros at Bar Brim, a busy café infused with the fine stink of slow-burning black tobacco and clean sweat softened by lavender water, I'd cross the street and slip into Cádiz's

Mercado Central de Abastos, a shadowy gastronomic seraglio.

Soothed by its musky light, I'd discover a vividly perfumed circus that needled me with pleasure while letting me be invisible. If I loved the olive stalls, the chickpeas and fava beans, and the charcutier's stand with its carnivore's curtain of dangling brick red chorizos and its satanically handsome butcher, it was the fishmongers of this port city at the door between the cold Atlantic Ocean and the warm Mediterranean Sea that truly fascinated me. I could study their lavish and mysterious offerings for hours, and every day I'd come across a kind



From left: Dolores's brokenhearted chicken, shrimp fritters, and clams in sherry sauce (see recipes on pages 28 and 30).

TODD COLEMAN

of fish I'd never seen before—science-fiction-strange goose barnacles, or scarlet scorpion fish. Though I didn't know it at the time, slowly but surely, the market was healing me, a just-turned-30 writer living in Paris in the 1980s.

One morning, I'd stared at the neat rows of fire-engine red *carabinero* prawns from the southwestern city of Huelva long enough to suddenly sense the seller's swelling impatience, so I swiftly moved on to another corner of the market. If the seafood aisle at the market's heart smelled of iodine and roses, this one was about smoky *pimentón* and the sweet ethylene punch of tiny bunches of Canary Islands bananas hanging on sharp iron hooks. Stealthily, or so I thought, I sniffed the fruit.

"Hola! Que tal? Go on then, have one, luv! You know you want it!" The stallholder, a busty, coal-eyed gypsy princess in a low-cut lemon yellow dress, was speaking to me. I was dumbstruck, and blushing. This woman I'd never noticed before was now roaring with laughter. "American? Are you American? I just knew it! So hopeless the way your lot peers at the world through keyholes in the hopes of spotting a dirty stereotype or two. My old dad was from Liverpool." Now I was laughing, too, also rather hysterically. "What's your name?"

I told her.

"I'm Dolores. So, Alejandro, what happened? I've watched you sulking around in here for a couple of days like a monk in an abbey, and you never buy anything." I choked up instantly. "Oh dear, sorry I asked." She waved her hands. "Oh dear, don't worry." Suddenly this lusty-looking lady sounded like a nurse. "I'm sorry. I really am. Hey, how's about we get some lunch after I close my stall?"

Why did I say yes? Dolores's smile, maybe, and the fluttering frilled red silk carnation

she'd tucked behind an ear. It was both pretty and ironic.

Those were the years when my axis of eros was spinning fast on ever more extreme expressions of opposition. The equation was that the less I had in common with someone, the more I fancied him. Even today, there's a part of me that still wants to brag about my affairs with the Boer insurance salesman, the Portuguese lieutenant, and other men who couldn't possibly have been more different from me, a New Englander who'd gleefully bonfired the proprieties of a comfortable suburban upbringing and the gray-flannel career path suggested by an excellent education.

Soothed by the market's musky light, I'd discover a vividly perfumed circus that needled me with pleasure

I didn't see it then, but I was vainly living in the middle of a feckless carnival, one that had finally crashed when the hard-drinking Czech med student I'd been obsessed with smashed a terra-cotta casserole of clams on the floor of a restaurant in Valencia and walked out on me on the first day of our vacation. I muddled through a day alone like a compass without a needle, and then realized I needed to make a plan. Years before, during a trip to Seville, local friends had lamented that I wouldn't have time to see Cádiz. I put together the few shards of memory I had of their enticing descriptions—oldest city in Western Europe, founded by the Phoenicians, the fish, the light, the market, the shrimp fritters, the wine—and I left in the morning.

I loved my little whitewashed room with

powdery tiles where I could listen to the seagulls and innocently eavesdrop on other people's lives from behind the slatted shutters of my window, even though I barely spoke Spanish. The voices around me broke my solitude without requiring any risk on my part, and best of all was the market down the street, which quickly became my cloister.

Among many other things during that first lunch with Dolores the fruit vendor, I learned her Cádiz market dictum. "Never on Mondays," she said. "The market's open, but there's no fish for sale, and our market with no fish for sale is just about as interesting as a man without a—" She batted her long black eyelashes. "Coat?" I replied, and scored some more of that insane cackling. Mutually surprised by our odd friendship, we had lunch a couple of times that week, and all we talked about was food and the trials of love, but mostly food.

Dolores, I eventually found out, had trained indeed as a nurse but had chafed at the hours. She was involved with a jealous merchant marine captain she called the Cyclops. He'd ended up with a glass eye after a fight in a bar in Cape Town, and it was because he was shackled up at her house that Dolores and I couldn't do the thing that we most wanted to do alone together: cook. Still, she became my tutor in the cuisine of the *Gaditanos*, as the city's people call themselves, and oversaw my every meal, sending me to the tapas bar at El Faro for *tortillitas de camarones* (shrimp fritters) and *ortiguillas fritas* (sea anemone beignets), which tasted like the Mediterranean would

ALEXANDER LOBRANO's most recent story for *SAVEUR* was "*Blanquette de Veau*" (October 2012).

Dining in Cádiz

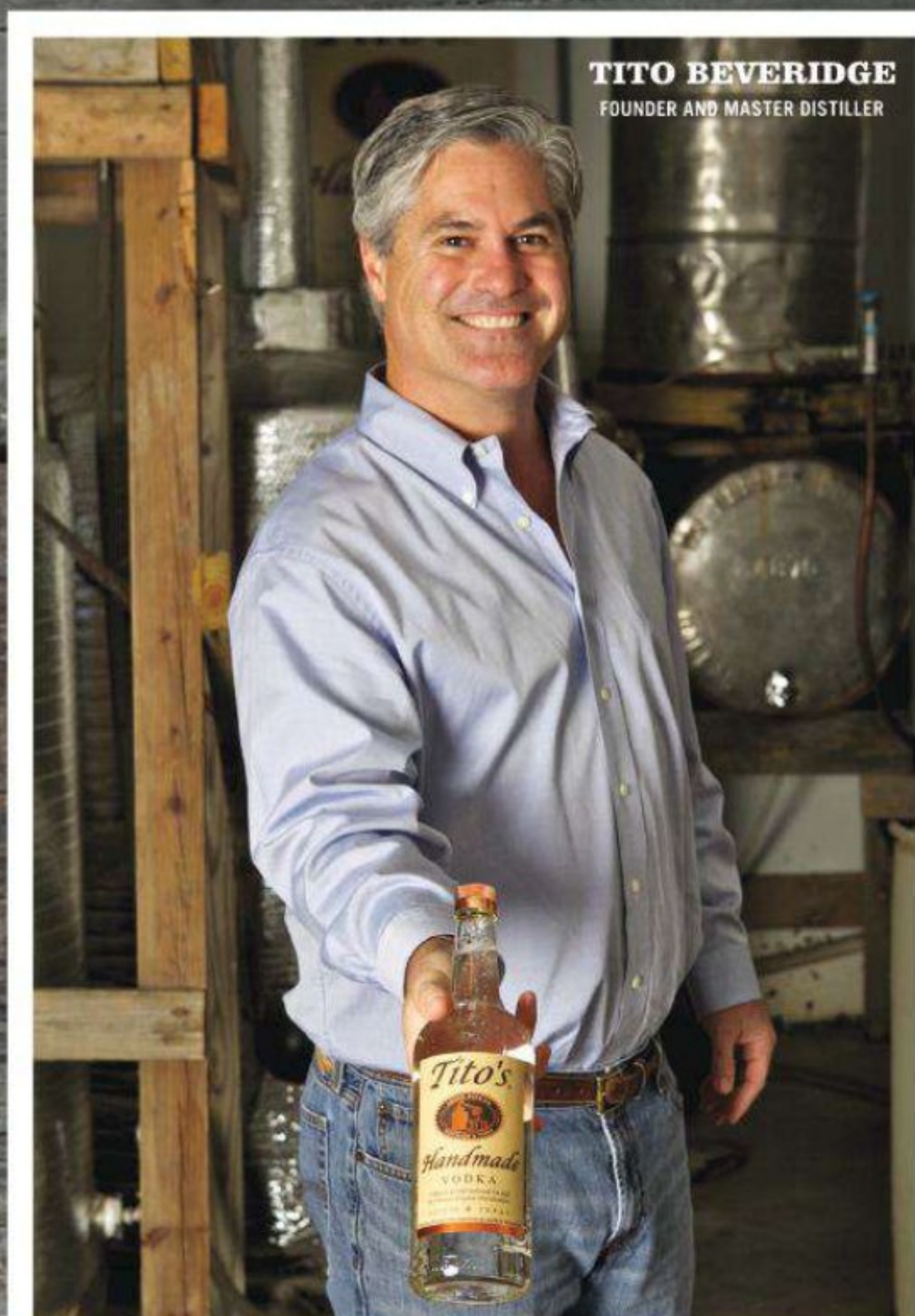
Sticking into the Atlantic like a beckoning soup spoon, the ancient Spanish port city of Cádiz is filled with friendly, inexpensive restaurants offering dishes made with wonderful local seafood and produce. A standby for me is **Balandro** (*Alameda de Apodaca 22; 34/956/220-992; restaurantebalandro.com*), a charming restaurant and tapas bar that's popular with students from the nearby university; overlooking the ocean, Balandro offers a great selection of fresh fish dishes, including succulent fishballs with clams and grilled cuttlefish with

seafood-and-squid-ink sauce. Don't be put off by the slightly rough-and-tumble atmosphere of **Cervecería Marisquería Aurelio** (*Calle Zorrilla 1; 34/956/221-031*); this tapas bar pours a terrific variety of manzanillas (a pale, dry sherry), which go nicely with the deep-fried whitening the locals love. Nearby, the ever popular **El Aljibe** (*Calle Plocia 25; 34/956/266-656; grupogrosso.com*) serves a menu of equally fine tapas, including pimientos stuffed with shrimp or creamy *tetilla* cheese, and delicate crêpes filled with langoustines and cockles in béchamel sauce. Take the ferry across the bay to **El Arriate** (*Calle de los Moros 4, Puerto de Santa*

María; 34/956/852-833; restaurantearriate.com), an excellent restaurant in an old wine warehouse on the edge of the port in El Puerto de Santa María. Here, chef David Méndez, though a dedicated locavore, draws inspiration from Asian cooking; dishes like the unctuous and slightly smoky *salmorejo* soup garnished with air-dried tuna and smoked mackerel, or grilled hake with sesame seeds on a bed of seaweed, show off his considerable talent. Long considered the best restaurant in town, **El Faro** (*Calle San Félix 15; 34/956/211-068; elfarodecadiz.com*) has an old-fashioned formality and a menu of impeccably prepared local special-

ties like *tortillitas de camarones* (shrimp fritters), sea anemone beignets, and snapper baked in salt. Cádiz abounds with humble fried-fish shops; **Freiduría Las Flores** (*Plaza de Topete 4; 34/956/226-112*) is one of the best. Order a *surtido* (mixed seafood fry) if you're unfamiliar with the local catch of the day. In a seafood-loving city, **Mesón Cumbres Mayores** (*Calle Zorrilla 4; 34/956/213-270; mesoncumbresmayores.com*), housed in an old brewery, is a redoubt for carnivores; try the silky, garnet-colored *jamón* from Huelva and the *berza*, a rich, cold-weather stew made with chickpeas, *jamón*, and *morcilla* (blood sausage). —A.L.

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if you boiled it down to a saucepan of liquid. “The reason our cooking is good is that it’s always been a cuisine of mercy and curiosity,” she said. “We lived in a ménage à trois for centuries—Arabs, Christians, Jews—and then, after the river silted up and choked off stuffy old Seville, Cádiz got rich.”

One day when the Cyclops was away, Dolores invited me to the beach and brought a picnic, including a little tub of *manteca colorá* (scarlet *pimentón*-flavored pork fat), which she spread on crackers and served with sherry, and a quartered chicken that had been roasted in Oloroso wine. “I call it brokenhearted chicken,” she told me. “Because it tastes so good it makes you hungry even if you’re heartbroken.” The bird tasted lightly caramelized and gently garlicky. I matched her wing for wing, leg for leg, thigh for thigh. “This is Gaditana cooking,” she said, “simple but sincere.”

The last time I saw her, we spent the whole afternoon in a tapas bar, and when it was time for her to go home to the Cyclops, she emphatically forbade me to come and say good-bye at the market the following morning before I got my train back to Paris. “The last thing we need is more drama in our lives,” she said. “Just promise me you’ll come back sometime very soon so that we can cook together.”

During the years that followed, she sent me a Marks & Spencer Christmas card every December, and I never forgot her birthday—it’s the day after mine. I called her a few times, too, but our friendship was one that required physical presence. Through three Paris apartments, I kept a postcard of Cádiz taped to the bookcase by my desk, but freed of my demons, I just kept getting busier and busier with work.

Then last year, there was no Christmas card, so I called. The number had been disconnected, so I wrote, and many months later, I was puzzled by a letter with an Uruguayan stamp in my mailbox. A daughter I didn’t know Dolores had wrote to tell me that her mother had died of lung cancer just before Christmas.

I was devastated. And ashamed. I hadn’t been much of a friend to the woman who’d nursed my wounds so gently that I barely noticed. Now she was gone, and for a week, her death was the first thing I thought of when my eyes opened in the morning. Then one day, I knew what I needed to do—keep my promise. So, I rented a little apartment with a decent kitchen in the Calle Rosario, and I went back to Cádiz to cook.

ARRIVING LATE, I DUMPED my bag and ducked around the corner to a tapas bar called El Aljibe for some *choco en su tinta* (cuttlefish in its own

ink) and a lot of white wine. I fell asleep that night with the smell of the city’s brine-wetted limestone in my nostrils for the first time in two decades. Up at dawn, I hurried down the Calle de Columela with my canvas shopping bag, rounded the corner by the handsome art-nouveau post office, and had a shock.

After 20 years, the Mercado Central de Abastos, the oldest covered market in Spain, had changed. Unbeknownst to me, it had been completely renovated and redesigned, a project, as I later learned, by architect Carlos de Riaño that was completed in 2010. Now, the original honey-colored stone walls surrounded two white and airy bright pavilions.

I had a day to get my bearings in this clean-edged and decidedly not murky market before friends from LA arrived—the first in a rotation of visitors I’d invited here to help fuel a week’s worth of cooking—so I wandered and poked and prodded and sniffed and sampled and chatted a little bit here and a little bit there. Finally, finding my safe harbor among the fishmongers’ stalls, I bought a half kilo of tiny *almejas* (clams), which I would cook *Gaditano* style, in sherry and garlic, and then purchased a fat, silver-blue dorada from a vendor named Miguel Perales, whose aura of gentleness matted against strength made him look like he’d just stepped out of a Zurbarán painting.

For a week I cooked and cooked, first with the Angelenos, then with an Australian pal from Madrid, next with another Yank living in Barcelona, and finally for a couple from London. One day it was the sherry-cooked clams, the next it was crisp cubes of marinated swordfish, a recipe Dolores had given me, and then it was her brokenhearted chicken, followed by sea bream baked with peppers and tomatoes in a heady bath of bone-dry palomino wine. On the last day, I was exhausted but exultant. Memory may lie, but food can’t.

The first time I fell for the market in Cádiz it was because of the annealing sensuality of its produce and the friendship I found there. The second time I discovered an equally intense but more studious passion. It only took a few days before the market denizens I’d decided to make mine smiled when they saw me in the morning and were willing to share a recipe or two. From Miguel the fishmonger came the one for sea bream. From David Méndez, a chef I’d struck up a conversation with at Miguel’s stall, came another, for a creamy tomato and bread soup garnished with strips of salt-cured tuna.

And on that last, sun-baked afternoon in Cádiz when I’d sought some shade and

a breeze on the edge of one of the faience-paved terraces in the lush subtropical gardens of the Parque Genovés, a white-haired lady in a nearby kiosk brought me a glass of cold water when she heard me crying. Calmer than I’d been in years, I’d never really looked at my scars before, and as a middle-aged man with a happy, settled life, I was slow to realize that they’re a blessing. They’re not only the reason for my relentlessly questing appetite, they also remind me of the storms I’ve survived and the very special people whom I’ve known. 🍀

Dolores’s Brokenhearted Chicken

SERVES 4

Caramelized garlic and dry sherry make a luscious sauce for this simple but delectable braised chicken dish (pictured on [page 25](#)).

- ½ cup flour
- 1 3-lb. whole chicken, cut into 8 pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 slices bacon, roughly chopped
- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 5 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 1 cup chicken stock
- ½ cup dry sherry
- 2 tbsp. roughly chopped parsley
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter, cut into ½” cubes
- Country bread, for serving

1 Heat oven to 350°. Place flour in a bowl; set aside. Season chicken with salt and pepper, and dredge in flour; set aside. Heat bacon in a 12” ovenproof skillet over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring, until its fat renders, about 4 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer bacon to a bowl; set aside. Add oil to skillet, and working in 2 batches, add chicken, and cook, turning once, until browned on both sides, about 12 minutes. Transfer to a plate and set aside.

2 Add garlic to the skillet, and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Add stock and sherry, and return chicken to the skillet, skin-side up; sprinkle with reserved bacon along with parsley, and then dot with butter. Transfer skillet to oven, and cook, basting twice during cooking, until chicken is cooked through and tender, about 40 minutes; serve with country bread.

Almejas à la Gaditana

(Clams in Sherry Sauce)

SERVES 4–6

This classic Andalusian seafood dish (pictured on [page 25](#)) is traditionally served with lots of crusty bread, to soak up the piquant broth.

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- 3 tbsp. olive oil
- 5 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 3 lb. (about 3 dozen) small clams, such as littlenecks, scrubbed clean
- 1 cup dry white wine
- ½ cup dry sherry
- ¼ cup finely chopped parsley
- 2 small red Thai chiles, stemmed and finely chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Country bread, for serving

Heat oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add garlic, and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 2 minutes. Add the clams, wine, sherry, parsley, and chiles; season with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, and cook, covered, until the clams open, about 12 minutes; uncover the pan and remove and discard any clams that don't open. Serve with bread on the side.

Tortillitas de Camarones

(Shrimp Fritters)

MAKES 1 DOZEN

These crisp-edged fritters (pictured on [page 25](#)) get their earthy flavor from chickpea flour.

- ⅓ cup olive oil
- ½ small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 12 oz. raw medium shrimp, peeled, deveined, and finely chopped
- ¼ cup chickpea flour (see [page 92](#))
- 2 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 2 tbsp. roughly chopped parsley
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. hot paprika
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Lemon wedges, for serving

1 Heat 2 tbsp. of the oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add the onions, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 6 minutes. Transfer onions to a bowl, and add the shrimp, both flours, parsley, baking powder, paprika, salt, and 5 tbsp. water; stir to combine thoroughly. Set batter aside for 10 minutes.

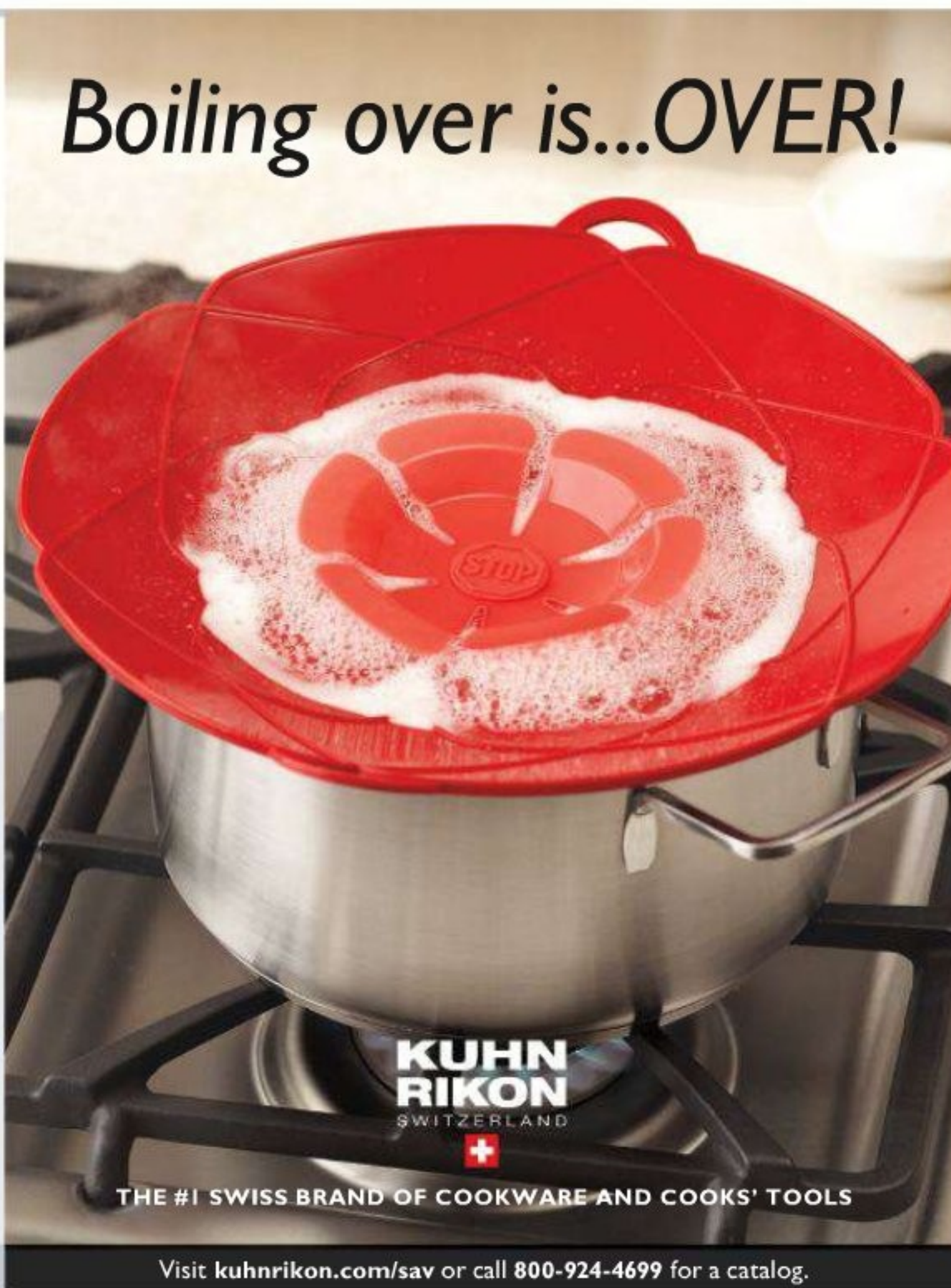
2 Heat remaining oil in skillet over medium-high heat, and working in batches, add 2 tbsp. batter, and cook, flipping once, until golden brown and crisp at the edges, about 3 minutes. Using a spatula, transfer to paper towels to drain; season with salt and pepper. Serve with lemon wedges.



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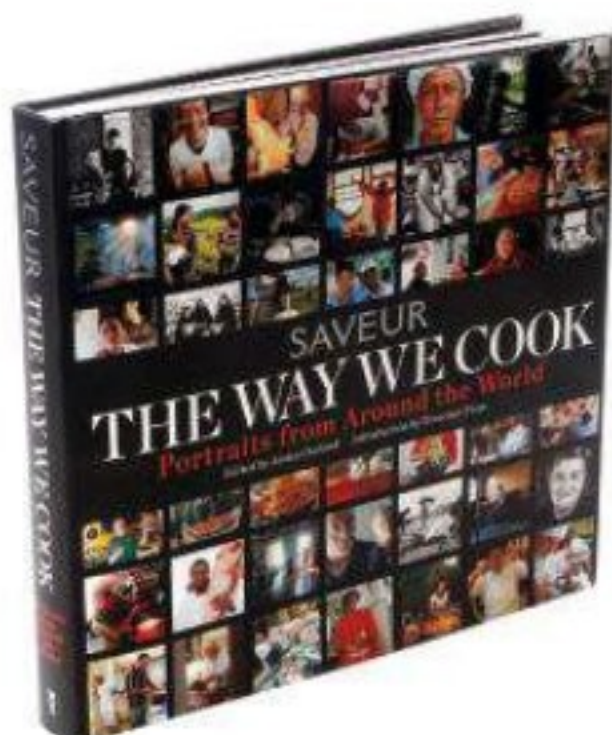
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Bread Winner

The Berkshires are home to some of the country's best loaves

BY GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

WHEN MOST TOURISTS VISIT THE Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts, their first stop might be Norman Rockwell's old studio, Edith Wharton's country home, the farmhouse where Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick*, or another of the area's seemingly countless cultural attractions. Not me. Anytime I'm in this corner of my home state, I head for a source of more ephemeral pleasures: Berkshire Mountain Bakery, where owner Richard Bourdon crafts loaves that are among the best in the country.

Since opening his bakery in 1986 in the tiny village of Housatonic, Bourdon has been perfecting his naturally fermented breads, building on experience he gained in France and Holland, where he trained as a baker. Here, in a 3,000-square-foot former paper mill, he devotes the majority of the cavernous space to around-the-clock baking, while a sliver of a retail counter shows off his diverse breads: sesame-crustured sourdoughs, rich jalapeño-and-cheese ciabattas, French peasant loaves, and, during the holidays, sweet breads such as buttery stollen with an almond-cream core, the world's fluffiest panettone, and more.

No matter the style, each bread is made with meticulous attention

to detail. To insure the freshness of volatile oils that would otherwise be exposed by cracking the germs further ahead of time, Bourdon grinds whole grains to make spelt, wheat, or rye flour for each batch of dough. Then, using little more than water, salt, and a sourdough starter, he transforms these grains into singular loaves with an incredible balance of texture, moisture, and flavor.

Whether it's nutty wholemeal spelt, cakey multigrain, or—my personal favorite—the finger-staining “bread and chocolate” (pictured), with its equal parts sourdough boule and semisweet Belgian chocolate chunks, each loaf bears Bourdon's marks: a glossy, tender crumb; a buoyant, tooth-clinging chew; and a mouthwatering tang. The breads are all brilliant when eaten in the usual ways—smeared with butter, used in sandwiches, munched on their own—and the sweet ones, like the bread and chocolate, make for a complex bread pudding or decadent French toast. No matter how I eat them, each bite reminds me that the transformation of flour and water into something extraordinary is, in its own right, a serious art. Loaves range from \$3.75 to \$5.75 apiece and can be purchased at berkshiremountainbakery.com. 

MICHAEL KRAUS



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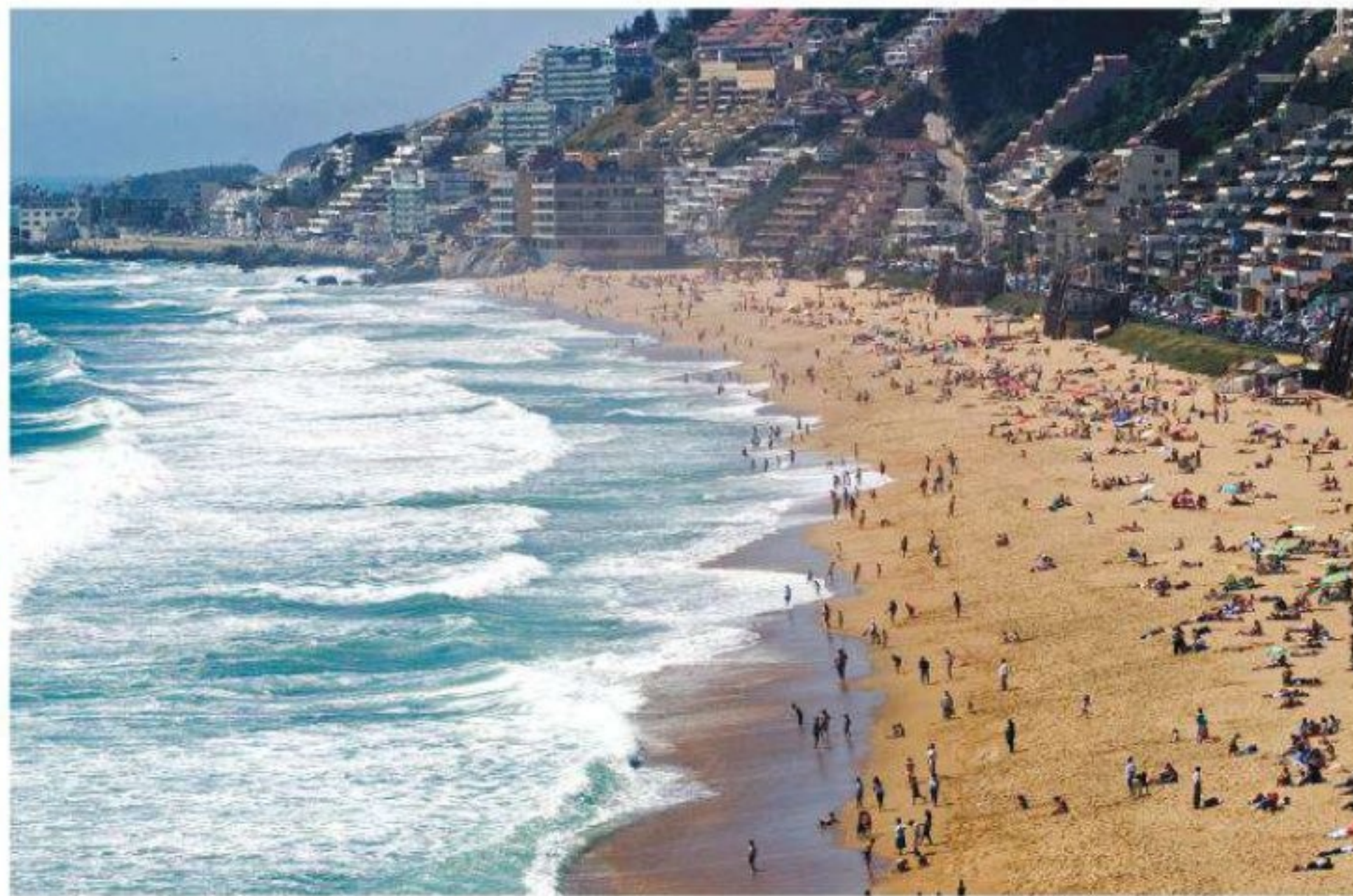
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CHILE

A SEAFOOD LOVER'S DELIGHT



Chilean poet, diplomat, and politician Pablo Neruda, once described Chilean seafood chowder as a dish in which “you may know heaven.” It should probably come as no surprise then that some of the world’s most flavorful seafood awaits you along Chile’s nearly 3,000 miles of stunning Pacific coastline.

Chilean poet, diplomat, and politician Pablo Neruda, once described Chilean seafood chowder as a dish in which “you may know heaven.”

For a seafood lover’s tour of Chile, start in **Valparaíso**, the country’s largest port, oldest city, and a UNESCO World Heritage site. At the historic port, tour the bay in one of the hundreds of small boats waiting at the docks before enjoying a waterside meal of **corvina**. A staple in both tangy *ceviche* and in *marinera*, corvina is a dish with red sauce, local clams, mussels, and shrimp. Don’t leave Valparaíso (or “Pancho,” as locals call their city) without taking a ride on one of the outdoor elevators to enjoy the spectacular sea views from more than 40 hills.

Just north of the Valparaíso is seaside **Viña del Mar**. Although nicknamed the “Garden City,” it’s lauded for its beautiful beaches and delicious local seafood. It’s the perfect destination for seaside dining, perhaps on fried merluza, Chile’s most popular (and least expensive) fish.

A short drive further up the coast is **Reñaca**, one of central Chile’s trendiest beach destinations, where a fashionable crowd enjoys a vibrant night-life, golden sand, and seafood delights ranging from king crab to stuffed sea bass. Finally, nearby **Concón**, the site of a renowned nature sanctuary, is a favorite coastal destination for casual seafood eateries. While here, try ordering another Chilean favorite, **reinetas**; its mild taste and firm texture lend itself especially well to grilling.



REVIEW

Mexico City Star

At Pujol, chef Enrique Olvera elevates native ingredients to stellar heights

BY BETSY ANDREWS

THIS PAST SUMMER, the *infusión de quelites* that kicked off the meal at Pujol, the groundbreaking Mexico City restaurant, came in a French press pot, a verdigris tangle in a warm salt bath. Plunged and poured, this clean, golden-green broth of mixed, small-leafed greens—amaranth, lamb's-quarters, and others—flavored with charred onion and pasilla chile was supremely simple and soulful. Breathing in its fragrant steam, I felt the stress of fine dining in a foreign language melt away. My ego relaxed; my spirits rose.

This small restaurant, with its charcoal-walled, low-ceilinged dining room, was the last place I'd expect to feel so close to those plants—or, as it turned out, so close to the street. But Pujol's acclaimed young chef Enrique Olvera managed to deliver an experience that was at once transcendent and deeply rooted in Mexico. The heavenly *quelites* brew came on the heels of Pujol's devilish amuse, a riff on the grilled corn that you find hawked on seemingly every Mexico City corner. Skewered

At Pujol, a dish of octopus *a la mexicana* is served with a creamy olive purée.

elotitos, or baby corn, were draped in coffee mayonnaise, lime, and an earthy mixture of salt and toasted ground flying ants. They were served in a gourd filled with burning corn husks that recalled a *cazuela*, a traditional cooking pot. The cobs were crunchy and sweet; the dressing creamy and bitter. With its sour, umami, saline, and smoky notes, it was a lagniappe that seemed to offer everything.

All of these flavors, all this food for thought in the first few bites of a multicourse meal? I'd been in Mexico several days before my first visit to Pujol. I'd walked between rows of vegetables on small family farms, cooked mole and tortillas in Mexican homes, gorged on *cemitas* and quesadillas at market stalls. But just when I was getting acquainted with the hallmarks of the cuisine, Olvera upended what I thought I knew about good Mexican food—and where to get it. In the process, he left me with an appreciation for the vitality and purpose of fine dining in a country abounding with excellent cheap eats. There was a richness to the references in the dishes that I ate at Pujol, a conceptual and sensory interplay as exciting as the action on the capital's teeming *avenidas*. For Olvera, it's all

about promoting Mexican culinary tradition by playing with it.

With its inclusion for a second year on San Pellegrino's list of the world's 50 best restaurants, Pujol is the most visible player in the transformation of Mexico City's haute dining scene, which has been under way for more than a decade. In the 12 years since Olvera opened Pujol, other noteworthy chefs, such as Patricia Quintana and Ricardo Muñoz Zurita, have launched new restaurants to serve not the Continental cooking of past decades, but stylish versions of the full-flavored dishes that the majority of Mexicans eat in their homes, on the streets, in taquerias, and in fondas. Where once there were French and Spanish classics, now there are tacos and tamales composed of indigenous greens and corn, beans and chiles.

Olvera lists Muñoz Zurita, author of the *Diccionario Enciclopédico de Gastronomía Mexicana* (Clio Editorial, 1998), a seminal work on traditional Mexican cookery, as an influence. But for the 36-year-old Olvera, tradition is only a starting place. Trained abroad at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, Olvera cooks

Mexican food with a global perspective. The chefs Thomas Keller and Ferran Adrià are also among his inspirations—Olvera's unctuous and elegant *huevos con nopales*, in which creamy, nutty giant ant eggs sit in a pool of emulsified hen egg dusted with burnt onion powder, recalls the caviar, mollusk, and sabayon of Keller's famous "oysters and pearls," and he says his potato soufflé, in its puffed masa casing, is cribbed from Adrià's now-closed restaurant, El Bulli. The chef appears frequently at events outside Mexico, and his cookbooks, *UNO* (Editorial DN3, 2010) and *En La Milpa* (Editorial DN3, 2011), are filled with photos of lush farmsteads as well as gorgeously deconstructed dishes. René Redzepi, the pioneering chef of the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, is a friend. He is, in short, a chef that seeks to honor his native foods by elevating them in unique and exhilarating ways on a global stage, much like Redzepi has with his New Nordic cuisine.

At Pujol, the loin of the Yucatán bald pig, a miniature breed known for its sumptuous fat, is a perfect porcine rectangle, poised in a bowl into which a server pours a silky ebony black bean-and-pork infusion. Sleek and composed, it's a far cry from the rustic *frijoles con puerco* eaten in Tabasco or Yucatecan markets, but its DNA is a close match, and it's equally delicious. A half-moon of candied sweet potato arranged with cubes and quenelles of yogurt and milk ice creams, a sweet amaranth wafer, and toasted pumpkin seeds in a pool of guava purée is as geometrically sophisticated as a Léger painting, but the dessert's component parts would be familiar to any sweet-toothed Mexican toddler.

Olvera's project, too, extends to the drink pairings; in addition to Mexican wine, craft beer, and mezcal to accompany dishes, there are several enticing *aguas frescas*, those ubiquitous street drinks made with fresh produce. A cilantro, cucumber, and lime version comes with a red snapper *chicharrón*; a strawberry-cardamom elixir and other blends come along later. "It's a way that you can feel like you are in Mexico," Olvera told me when I called him after my visits. "People who come from wine countries are not necessarily going to be impressed by Mexican wines, but we can highlight the creativity of the waters."

Yet some of Olvera's references are so subtle and particular that even Mexican diners might not catch them. An heirloom tomato salad, a sort of global indicator of locavorism, seems just fine. But few would realize that in this dish, garnished with a marble-size orb

of *quesillo*, a string cheese, along with sesame seeds, a large bean leaf sprayed with the essence of jalapeño chiles, and a chipotle vinaigrette—all the flavors one would find in a *cemita*—the chef has created a sly paean to that Pueblan sandwich.

Olvera's octopus *a la mexicana*, in a traditional red, green, and white salsa that mirrors the colors of the Mexican flag, quietly announces the chef's intention to cement Mexican food in the pantheon of the globe's most revered. But it took the chef explaining it afterward for me to understand: The question-mark curl of a single poached tentacle is partially peeled, as is common in Mexican homes, partially cloaked in suckers, as in Galicia, Spain, and partially tempura-fried, a nod to Japan. The dish is an homage to all three foodways and a demonstration of the chef's internationalist ethos. Still, no matter the concept, the octopus looks beautiful, and it tastes great.

Though Olvera's food is fancified and sometimes fantastical, with elements borrowed from cuisines the world over, it's

A perfect porcine rectangle, poised in a bowl with a silky black bean-and-pork infusion, is a far cry from the rustic *frijoles con puerco* eaten in Mexico's markets

executed with reverence for the rustic techniques and age-old methods of the traditional *cocina*. Tender and mild as a lullabye, the meat in the milk-fed lamb, paired with green pea purée on a poblano-chile-and-cilantro tortilla, has a silkiness that I would have sworn came as a result of sous vide cooking. It turns out that it's prepared in a conventional oven at an ultralow temperature, a method that Olvera adopted from traditional slow-smoked *barbacoa*.

Borrowing, too, a practice from *la milpa*, an age-old style of Mexican farming, with its "tradition of harvesting and using everything," as the chef puts it, Olvera lets little go to waste. His economy is a platform for his creativity. Olvera breaks down a single red snapper, for instance, to make three separate preparations. He serves its filet with a creamy onion purée, ginger-and-habanero confit, and a drizzle of orange oil. He fries the skin for the oceanic *chicharrón* garnish on the *agua fresca*. And he makes ceviche from the trimmings to stuff a chayote-based tortilla, decorated with an aromatic *hoja santa* leaf, as one might find

done in the north of the country.

"We're rediscovering all the traditions, and that's a really good thing," the chef told me. "At the market level, the quality has always been great. And most Mexicans eat really well at home. We didn't see that in restaurants. Now we're starting to."

Indeed, Olvera has inspired a whole new generation of young Mexico City chefs. Daniel Ovadia of the edgy Paxia, Sud 777's Edgar Núñez, and Pujol alumnus Jorge Vallejo of the restaurant Quintonil all share Olvera's aspiration to meld Mexican heritage with far-flung innovations. "We need to be taking the cuisine further than just reinterpreting our traditions," Olvera says. "We're trying to change things a little bit."

So he leads diners toward dessert with an intermezzo called *plátano dominico pasado* that tastes ancient and entirely new all at once. A banana so ripe it is starting to ferment is browned in butter, dotted with sour cream and mint leaves, draped in black curls of chile, and dusted with feathery ground macadamia. Though the rest of the ingredients are familiar, the nuts are a relatively new crop, a representation of the potential of the Mexican soil. Just slightly sweet and also sour, earthy and creamy, toasty and bright, this banana dish demonstrates, in delectable fashion, how multifaceted the staple fruit can be.

Part of Olvera's success lies in the fact that when he nudges the cuisine along to new places, he does it with such charm and wit. Take the avocado flauta on Pujol's "sea menu." Instead of a deep-fried tortilla, the cigar-shaped roll is formed with overlapping, paper-thin avocado slices, each perfectly ripe and pristine. Stuffed with poached shrimp and octopus and paired with a dollop of mild chipotle mayonnaise, this flauta recalls not so much the vendor snack after which it is named as it does a quintessential dish for the ladies who lunch, half an avocado stuffed with seafood salad. The mash-up of forms is intentional, an exemplar of the chef's sense of humor. If he must feed high-end diners, it seems, he might as well serve a little joke on them. Olvera's graceful riff might lack the textural and chile-driven punch of its streetwise namesake. But it's delicious in its own right, and it does just what seminal restaurant food should—it takes the culinary conversation far past the nearest corner. 🍴

PUJOL *Francisco Petrarca 254, Polanco, Mexico City (52/55/5545-3507; pujol.com.mx). Hours: Monday–Saturday 2–3:30 P.M., 7–10:30 P.M. Sea menu: \$69; land menu: \$76.*

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Light as a Feather

The key to achieving perfect tempura is to make a seemingly imperfect batter

BY HARRIS SALAT

AT ITS CRISPY, GOSSAMER BEST, tempura is unlike any other fried food. I remember the first time I ate at one of Tokyo's *tempura-ya* several years ago. At these specialized tempura shops, the chefs are experts at the technique, in which seafood and vegetables are dipped into a simple batter of flour, water, and egg yolks, then quickly cooked in hot vegetable oil and served piping hot. The deep-fried shrimp I ordered that day were steaming, sweet, and tender, with an airy, remarkably greaseless crust. Extra wisps of crunchy batter clung delectably to each piece. They were accompanied by a soy sauce—and-rice wine dipping sauce that was peppered with fresh, spicy grated ginger and daikon. I savored every bit of that tempura; for an American used to doughy batter-fried foods, it was a revelation.

Since then, I have eaten tempura innumerable times, in diners and noodle shops and at friends' homes all over Japan. Typically, it's been served alongside soba or udon noodles. Often it's paired with an umami-rich dipping sauce; sometimes it comes with a fine-grain sea salt flavored with dried shrimp, or *matcha-jio*, sea salt mixed with powdered *matcha* tea (see [page 84](#) for recipes). With every batch I've sampled, I've wondered how the cooks achieve that incomparable contrast between the snappy, juicy ingredients and their crackly, ethereal exterior.

Eventually, I turned to the chef Tadashi Ono, with whom I have collaborated on several cookbooks, for the answer. Ono has been preparing tempura for more than two decades, and he agreed to share his method for achieving near-perfect results. The key, he told me, is in the preparation of the batter; get it right, and you'll end up with a delectable crust that doesn't mask or overwhelm the flavors and textures of the fresh foods it envelops. Since tempura is a fast-cooking

method, these ingredients should be prepared beforehand, so they're ready to fry as soon as the batter is mixed. For four servings, Ono cuts one pound of raw vegetables into bite-size pieces, and four large shrimp, peeled and cut so that they stay straight and long when frying (see "Straighten Up" on [page 84](#)). Pat the ingredients dry, and allow them to come to room temperature before frying. Here's how to make the tempura:

1 Fill a deep, twelve-inch cast-iron skillet with about two quarts canola oil to a depth of at least one inch. Heat the oil over medium heat to 360°, checking it with a deep-fry thermometer placed in the skillet. Maintaining a consistent temperature is important: If the temperature is too low, the batter will absorb oil and won't crisp up; too high, and it will burn.

2 While the oil is heating, place one-half cup of cake flour on a plate for dredging, and line a sheet pan with paper towels for draining; set both aside. Place two egg yolks in a medium-size mixing bowl.

3 Mix the yolks with two cups of cold water. Add one-quarter cup of ice cubes. (Keeping the liquid ice cold will reduce gluten development in the batter.)

4 Add two cups of cake flour. (Low-protein cake flour helps minimize the formation of the glutens that can lead to a bready crust.) Grasping four chopsticks, their tips pointed down, stab at the flour to combine it with the liquid until a loose, lumpy batter forms, about thirty seconds. Do not whisk, and do not use a fork; you want the batter to be barely mixed, so as not to activate the glutens. Pockets of dry flour should be visible in the liquid, which should have the consistency of heavy cream. (Mix the batter just before cooking, so that the flour particles have limited time to absorb

moisture.) In the heat of the oil, that moisture will quickly dissipate, enhancing the tempura's crispiness.

5 To cook, start with the shrimp. Lightly dredge the shrimp in flour. This will help the batter adhere.

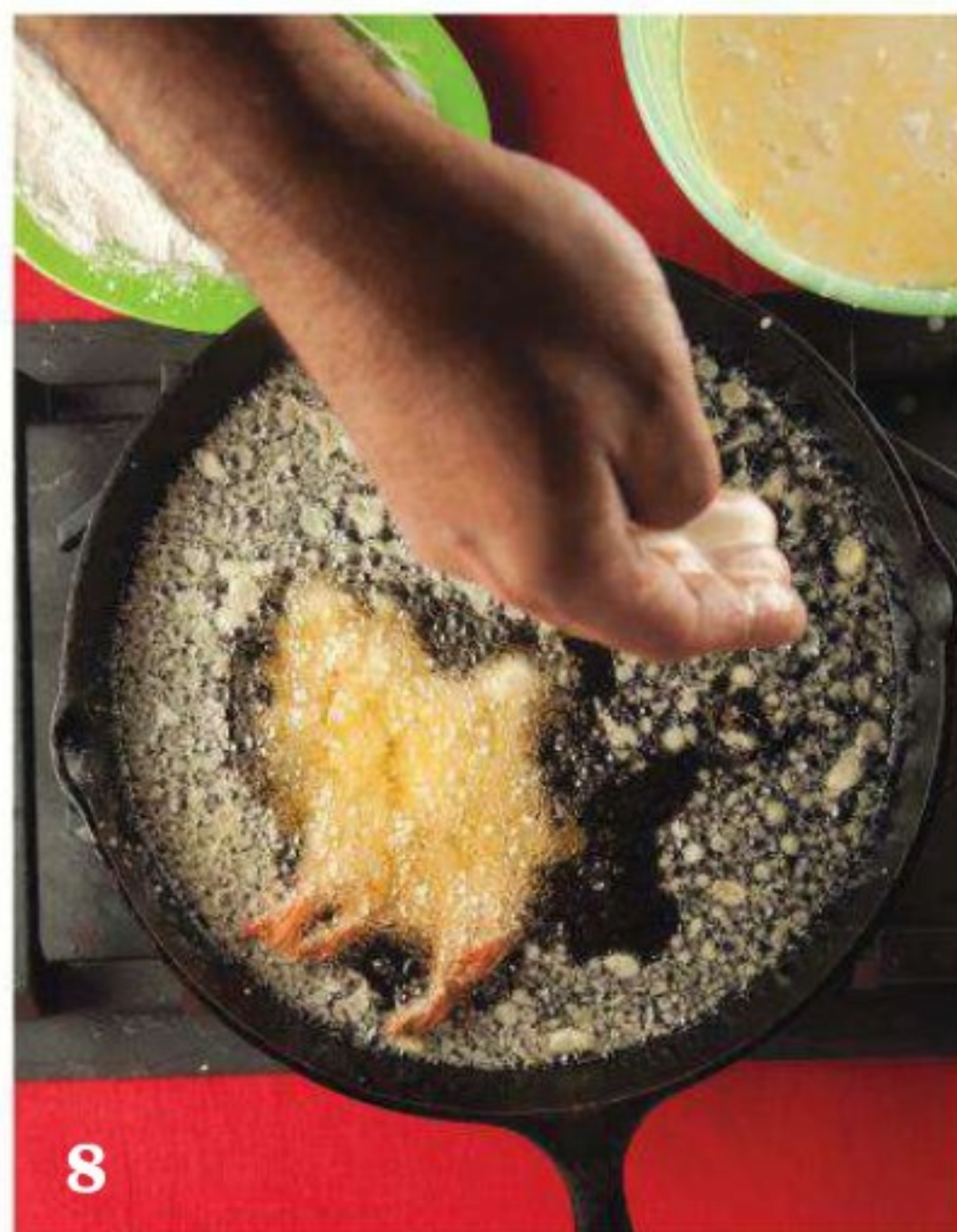
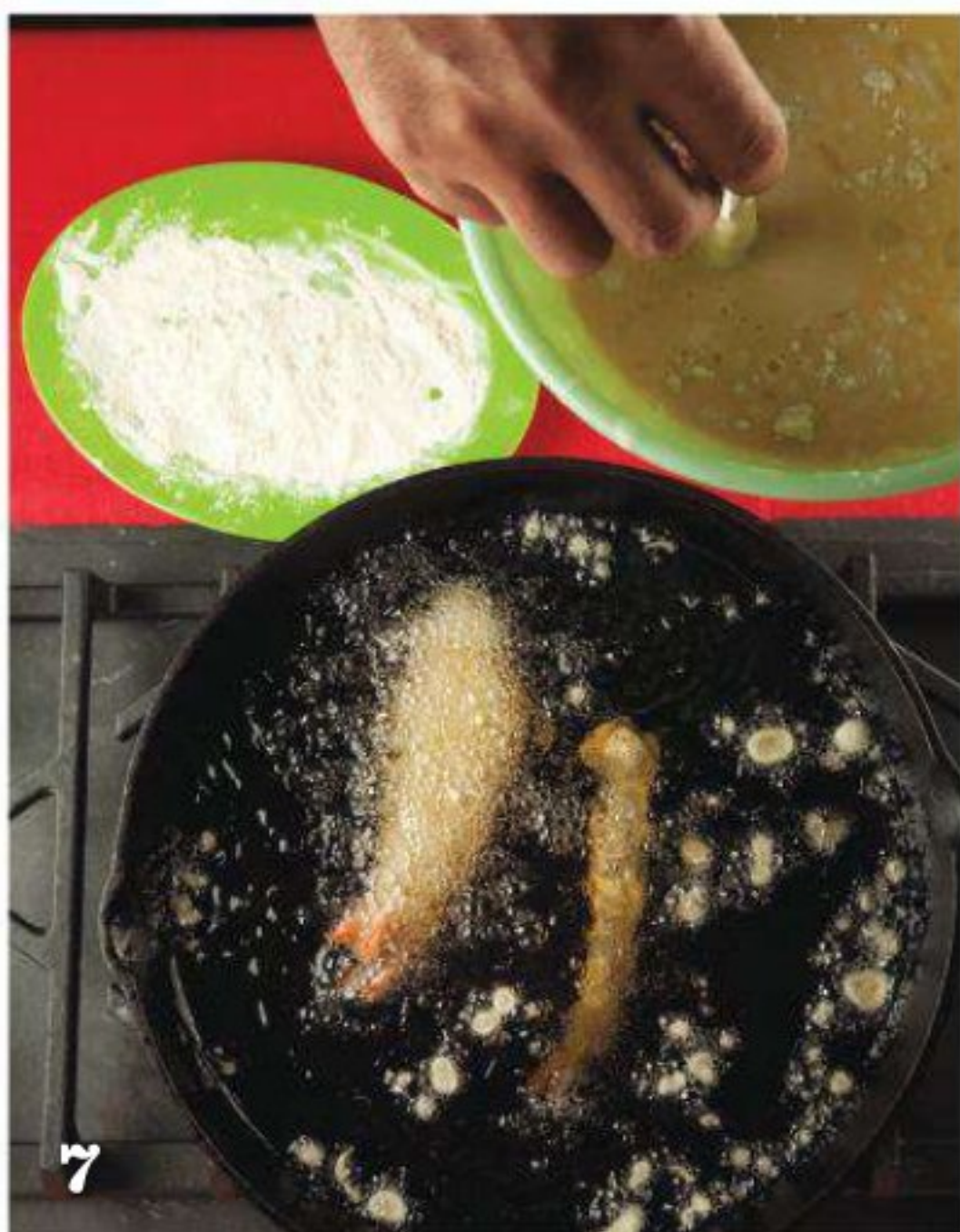
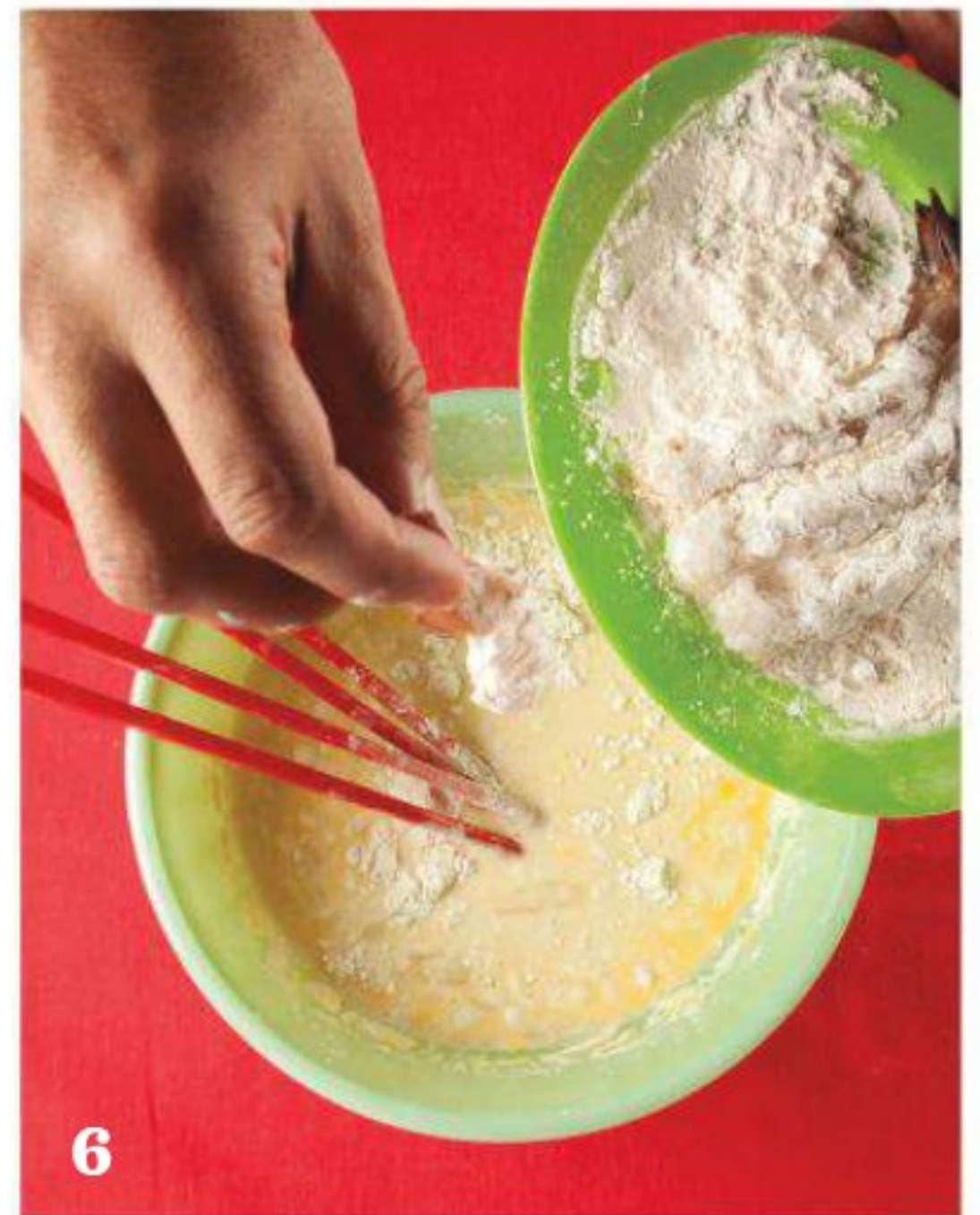
6 Dip the shrimp quickly into the batter. If the batter appears watery, sprinkle a little flour on top, but do not mix it in; dipping the ingredients in the batter will be enough to combine the flour with the liquid.

7 Just before frying, add one-quarter cup of toasted sesame oil to the frying oil. If the oil temperature lowers, allow it to rise back to 360°. Quickly lay each shrimp in the oil; separate them from one another with chopsticks. Tiny, brisk bubbles will form around each shrimp.

8 While the shrimp cook, dip your fingers into the batter and drizzle some directly over each shrimp so that the batter adheres to each piece. This process, called *hana o sakaseru*, will make the tempura even crispier, leaving crunchy, enticing tendrils on the surface of each piece. Use a slotted spoon to remove loose batter from the oil. (These bits of batter can be saved and used, as they are in Japan, as crunchy garnishes on salads and noodle dishes.) Cook the shrimp until the bubbles around them grow larger and less intense, and the batter turns golden brown, about three minutes. Remove the shrimp from the oil, and place them on the paper towels to drain.

9 To maintain consistent oil temperature, cook the rest of the ingredients in small batches. Cook vegetables at 350°, about two and a half minutes for most, and two minutes for bell peppers, asparagus, and leafy ingredients such as *shiso* and parsley. Serve the tempura immediately, with a dipping sauce or seasoned salt. 

HARRIS SALAT's most recent story for *SAVEUR* was "The Beauty of Nori" (October 2010).



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And this

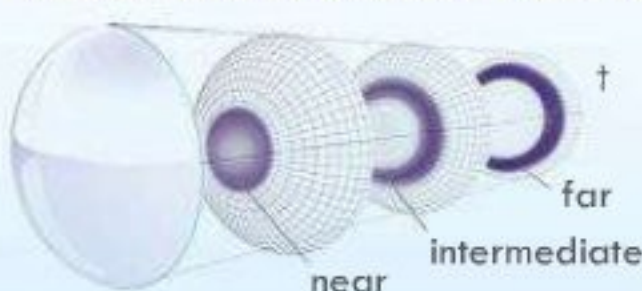
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INGREDIENT

Beyond the Pale

The unexpected allure of white chocolate

BY BEN MIMS

WHEN I FIRST TASTED white chocolate, I was a little kid with a gargantuan sweet tooth, and that pure hit of cocoa butter, milk, and sugar instantly hooked me. The confection had all of the qualities of regular chocolate—it was creamy, rich, and I could stash a bar in my pocket—without any of the cocoa bitterness that turned me off to darker confections. I ate it every chance I got, in candy bars (Hershey's Cookies 'n' Cream was a favorite) and in all kinds of baked goods, especially those fancy cookies that were so popular during my '90s youth, the ones that paired white chocolate with chunky macadamia nuts.

It wasn't until I was older that I learned that my passion for white chocolate was something to be ashamed of. In culinary school, where I went to make a career of my dessert lust, my peers turned their noses up at the stuff. "It isn't real chocolate," they said, or, "It's way too sweet." They swore, instead, by bittersweet chocolate and refused to use anything else in the kitchen. Nowadays, with the flood of high-percentage cacao bars on the market, the consensus seems to be on their side; the darker the chocolate, the better it's received.

Yet the more I bake with white chocolate, and the more excellent varieties I taste, I'm more confident than ever of this smooth, sweet ingredient's assets: It enriches ganaches and buttercreams, ice creams and panna cottas; it's a milky foil for zesty flavors like citrus and ginger, and for fragrant spices like cardamom; and it's mellow enough to carry the subtlety of teas and flowers, while resonating with the richness of ingredients like

TODD COLEMAN

Sweet and smooth with cocoa butter, white chocolate is a dream ingredient in all kinds of desserts.



From left: white chocolate–cardamom panna cotta (see [page 46](#) for a recipe); white chocolate–macadamia nut cookies (see [page 49](#) for a recipe).

nuts. It can even balance the intensity of dark chocolate and espresso. Not only that, but because white chocolate contains cocoa butter, milk, sugar, and vanilla, I can use it in recipes in place of butter and the other three ingredients—it adds extra lusciousness. You can’t do that with conventional chocolate.

Still, I was surprised to find out that the two types of chocolate are made in much the same way. For both, fermented, dried cacao beans are roasted and pulverized into a paste, and the cocoa butter is separated from the solids, which contain all the color, flavor, and bitterness associated with dark chocolate. Whereas regular chocolate incorporates cocoa solids into the final product, white chocolate omits them. Milk solids, usually in the form of powdered milk, are added instead to cocoa butter, sugar, and often vanilla, resulting in a creamy, sweet, and very pale chocolate.

It fascinates me that this one substitution—milk solids for cocoa solids—can lead to such a singular confection. Though the precise origins of white chocolate are murky, powdered milk seems to have played a major role in its popularization. Nestlé, who many credit with

developing white chocolate, began making it in the 1930s, apparently in response to a powdered milk surplus; during World War I, when powdered milk was in high demand, they had bought up companies that manufactured the product. When the war ended and consumers returned to fresh milk, the Swiss chocolate giant looked for new uses for the powdered kind. One of many new products launched during this time was a white chocolate bar called “Galak.”

For many years now, European pastry chefs have been creating with white chocolate, using it in cakes, tarts, wonderfully smooth mousses, and many other sweets. For chocolatiers, white chocolate is particularly enticing as a blank canvas for color and other decorative flourishes. Yet it took a while before white chocolate was part of the American pantry. Though it was available here as early as the mid-’40s, it wasn’t until 1979 that the dining critic Gael Greene, describing “a pristine oval of mousse sitting in a pool of dark chocolate” for *New York* magazine, was able to declare, “White chocolate is the season’s new whimsy.” In the ’80s, scores of cookbooks embraced the ingredi-

ent; *The Silver Palate Good Times Cookbook* (Workman, 1985) offered recipes for white chocolate and hazelnut cheesecake, and white chocolate and Frangelico mousse. By the 1990s, white chocolate had entered the canon of American dessert flavors; at the iconic Palace Café in New Orleans, it enriched the custard base for bread pudding, an innovation on a classic that inspired scores of other local riffs, including my favorite, a panko-fried version topped with brûléed bananas and more white chocolate at Mat & Naddie’s, also in New Orleans.

But, no matter how many great desserts it has been responsible for, white chocolate still bears a stigma. Part of the problem may lie in its tricky nature, which makes it more difficult to work with than other types of chocolate. Because the main ingredients are two fats that melt at different temperatures, molten white chocolate can turn out lumpy. To avoid this, I chop it into small pieces and stir it constantly to ensure quicker and more even melting. As white chocolate separates and burns easily, I melt it in a bowl over a hot water bath, or in the microwave for 30-second increments, and make sure the

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White Magic

While tasting white chocolates from both large producers and craft chocolatiers, we encountered a surprising spectrum of flavors, from grassy to fruity to salt-edged. Cocoa butter percentages generally varied from 29 to 55 percent, but we preferred the moderate creaminess of those composed of just over one-third cocoa butter. **Felchlin Mont Blanc Couverture** ① from Switzerland is mildly sweet with a fresh milkiness, well-suited to truffles and confections. France's **Valrhona Ivoire** ② has a deep, elegant richness that comes through best in puddings, ganaches, and frostings. **Askinosie Davao White Chocolate** ③, a single-origin bar made with goat's milk powder, offers layers of earthy, nutty, and floral flavors, and is best eaten out of hand. The caramel notes in **E. Guittard High Sierra** ④ lend cooked-sugar depth to glazes and ganache. The Ecuadorian cocoa butter in **Vintage Plantations 33% Cacao White Chocolate** ⑤ imparts powerful aromas of pineapple and coconut to any dessert. Intense **El Rey Icoa** ⑥ from Venezuela tastes strikingly of milk chocolate; melt it into ganache or hot cocoa. **Perugina White Chocolate** ⑦ from Italy possesses a balanced roundness reminiscent of sweetened condensed milk; it's perfect for custards. The straightforward dairy smoothness of **Lindt Classic Recipe White Chocolate** ⑧ makes it ideal for folding into cookies, brownies, or ice cream. **Ghirardelli White Chocolate Baking Bar** ⑨, with hints of coconut and honey, adds subtle fragrance to butter cakes, custards, or icings, while the soft salinity of **Cacao Barry Zephyr** ⑩ from Belgium makes it a match for nuts and dried fruits. —B.M.

temperature of the chocolate doesn't exceed 120 degrees.

When I'm shopping for it, I keep in mind that, as with other types of chocolate, quality is paramount. For much of its history, a lot of the white chocolate sold in the States hasn't been up to snuff. Expensive cocoa butter was swapped out for cheaper substitutes, namely vegetable fat, and more vanilla and sugar were added to compensate for the loss in flavor. When manufacturers did use the real stuff, most procured cocoa butter from multiple sources, with disparate, sometimes harsh flavor profiles. Those butters were usually bleached to neutralize their off flavors. The result has often been lesser-quality bars.

Happily, in 2002, the Food and Drug Administration created standards requiring minimum percentages of cocoa butter, milk solids, and milk fat (20, 14, and 3.5 percent, respectively) in order for a product to be labeled "white chocolate." And, nowadays, there's a crop of artisanal producers who are approaching white chocolate with the same dedication they show its darker counterparts. They gather beans from trusted sources and control their roasting to get the best batches of the rich, round natural cocoa butter that makes real white chocolate so great.

Sampling these bars, I've been astounded by their quality and range (see "White Magic," at left). Some are heady with tropical fruit flavor, others grassy or slightly salty or deeply rooted in vanilla. Together, they create that many more possibilities for fine-tuning and elevating white chocolate desserts. For a white-chocoholic like me, it's wonderful to know that I no longer need to be embarrassed by my childhood pleasure. 🍫

White Chocolate Bread Pudding with Bananas and Rum Sauce

SERVES 8

This decadent take on an iconic New Orleans dessert (pictured on [page 46](#)), from Mat & Naddie's Restaurant in New Orleans, Louisiana, gilds the lily, pan-frying white chocolate-enriched bread pudding, and plating it with satiny caramel and brûléed bananas.

For the bread pudding:

- 4½ cups milk
- 20 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ tsp. kosher salt
- 12 oz. stale country white bread, cut into ½" cubes (about 8 cups)

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rich dark chocolate



crunchy, roasted peanuts



sweet, toasty oats



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From left: white chocolate-cream cheese mousse (see [page 49](#) for a recipe); white chocolate bread pudding with bananas and rum sauce (see [page 44](#) for a recipe).

- 6 oz. white chocolate, roughly chopped, plus more for garnish
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup toasted slivered almonds
- 8 eggs
- 1 cup flour
- 2 cups panko bread crumbs

For the rum sauce and bananas:

- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sugar
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed
- 2 tbsp. dark rum
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup turbinado sugar, such as Sugar In the Raw
- 4 bananas, halved lengthwise and then halved crosswise

1 Make the bread pudding: Bring 4 cups milk, 16 tbsp. butter, sugar, vanilla, nutmeg, and salt to a simmer in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat; remove from heat, and let cool for 20 minutes. Combine bread, chocolate, and almonds in a large bowl; set aside. Add 6 eggs to milk mixture, and whisk until smooth. Pour custard over bread mixture, and stir until evenly combined; let sit to soften bread, about 20 min-

utes. Heat oven to 300°. Pour bread mixture into a 9" x 13" metal baking pan, making sure ingredients are evenly distributed, cover with foil, and bake until set, about 1 hour. Let cool to room temperature, and then refrigerate until chilled, at least 2 hours or overnight.

2 Meanwhile, make rum sauce: Bring sugar and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan over high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves; cook, without stirring, until sugar turns into an amber-colored caramel, about 15 minutes. Add cream, butter, rum, and juice, and stir until smooth; set sauce aside.

3 Place flour and bread crumbs in separate shallow dishes; whisk together remaining milk and eggs in a third shallow dish. Unmold bread pudding from pan, and cut into 8 rectangles. Heat 2 tbsp. butter in a 12" skillet over medium heat. Dredge each piece in flour, then coat in the milk mixture, and finally coat in bread crumbs. Add 4 pieces to skillet, and cook, turning once, until golden brown on both sides, about 6 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain briefly; repeat with remaining butter and pieces. While pudding is still hot, top each with a chunk of white chocolate.

4 To serve, place turbinado sugar on a plate, and dip the flat cut-side of each banana quarter in sugar to cover completely; place sugar-side up on a foil-lined baking sheet. Using a handheld blowtorch or the broiler, heat sugar until melted and caramelized, about 6 minutes if broiling; set aside. Pour rum sauce in the middle of 8 serving plates, and place 1 piece pudding in the center of each; place 2 brûléed banana quarters on either side of the bread pudding.

White Chocolate-Cardamom Panna Cotta

SERVES 6

Sweetened with white chocolate only, this rich, Middle Eastern-inspired panna cotta (pictured on [page 42](#)), from test kitchen assistant Phillip Basone, gets its distinctive floral aroma from an infusion of blistered cardamom.

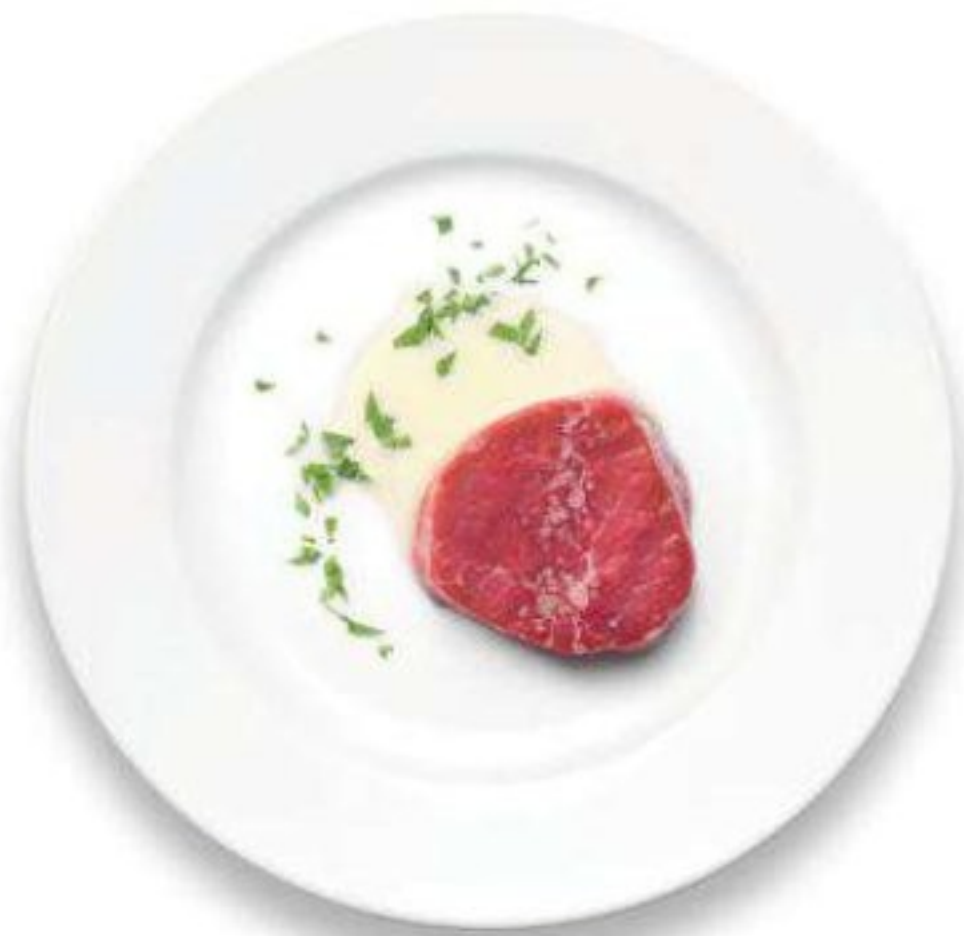
- 6 green cardamom pods
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups heavy cream
- 1 cup milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 vanilla bean, seeds scraped and reserved
- 2 tsp. unflavored powdered gelatin
- 12 oz. white chocolate, finely chopped

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- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tbsp. cornstarch
- 1 cup fresh orange juice
- ¼ cup orange liqueur, such as Grand Marnier
- Zest of 1 orange
- ⅓ cup orange marmalade
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed
- 1 orange, peeled of pith and segmented

1 Place cardamom pods in an 8" skillet over high heat, and cook, swirling pan occasionally, until charred and blistered in spots, about 4 minutes. Transfer to a bowl, and using a muddler or wooden spoon, crush to expose seeds; then transfer to a 2-qt. saucepan along with cream, ¾ cup milk, ¼ tsp. salt, and vanilla bean with seeds; bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Remove from heat, and let steep for 10 minutes. Combine remaining milk and gelatin in a small bowl; let sit to soften gelatin, about 5 minutes.

2 Place white chocolate in a bowl, and pour steeped cream mixture and gelatin mixture over chocolate; let sit for 1 minute. Using a small rubber spatula, slowly stir chocolate from the center until gelatin dissolves, and mixture emulsifies and is smooth. Pour through a fine strainer into a large glass measuring cup; discard solids. Divide mixture among six 6–8-oz. shallow ramekins or custard molds, and refrigerate until set, at least 4 hours.

3 Meanwhile, whisk together sugar and cornstarch in a 2-qt. saucepan; add juice, liqueur, and zest. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, and cook, stirring often, until thick, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat, and stir in marmalade and butter until smooth; let cool to room temperature. Add orange segments, and stir gently to combine with sauce; set aside.

4 To serve, run a paring knife around the edge of each ramekin, invert panna cotta onto a small plate, and spoon orange sauce on the side.

White Chocolate–Cream Cheese Mousse

SERVES 4–6

In this updated take on a classic French dessert (pictured on [page 46](#)), cream cheese adds stability and a pleasing tang, which balances the sweet white chocolate without overpowering it.

- 2 oz. cream cheese, softened
- 1 vanilla bean, split lengthwise, seeds scraped and reserved
- ½ cup heavy cream

- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 3 egg whites
- ¼ cup sugar
- 8 oz. white chocolate, finely chopped

1 Place cream cheese and vanilla seeds in a large bowl, and beat on medium-high speed of a hand mixer until very smooth, about 2 minutes. Add cream, and beat until smooth and fluffy, about 2 minutes more; set aside. Place salt and egg whites in another bowl, and beat on medium-high speed of a hand mixer until soft peaks form; while beating, slowly add sugar, and beat until stiff peaks form; set aside.

2 Place white chocolate in a medium bowl over a 4-qt. saucepan of simmering water, and cook, stirring constantly, until just melted; remove from heat, and let cool for 5 minutes. Pour white chocolate into cream cheese mixture, and fold with a rubber spatula until almost combined; add beaten egg whites, and fold gently until just combined. Transfer to a piping bag fitted with a ¾" tip, and pipe into serving glasses; refrigerate until set before serving, at least 2 hours.

★ White Chocolate–Macadamia Nut Cookies

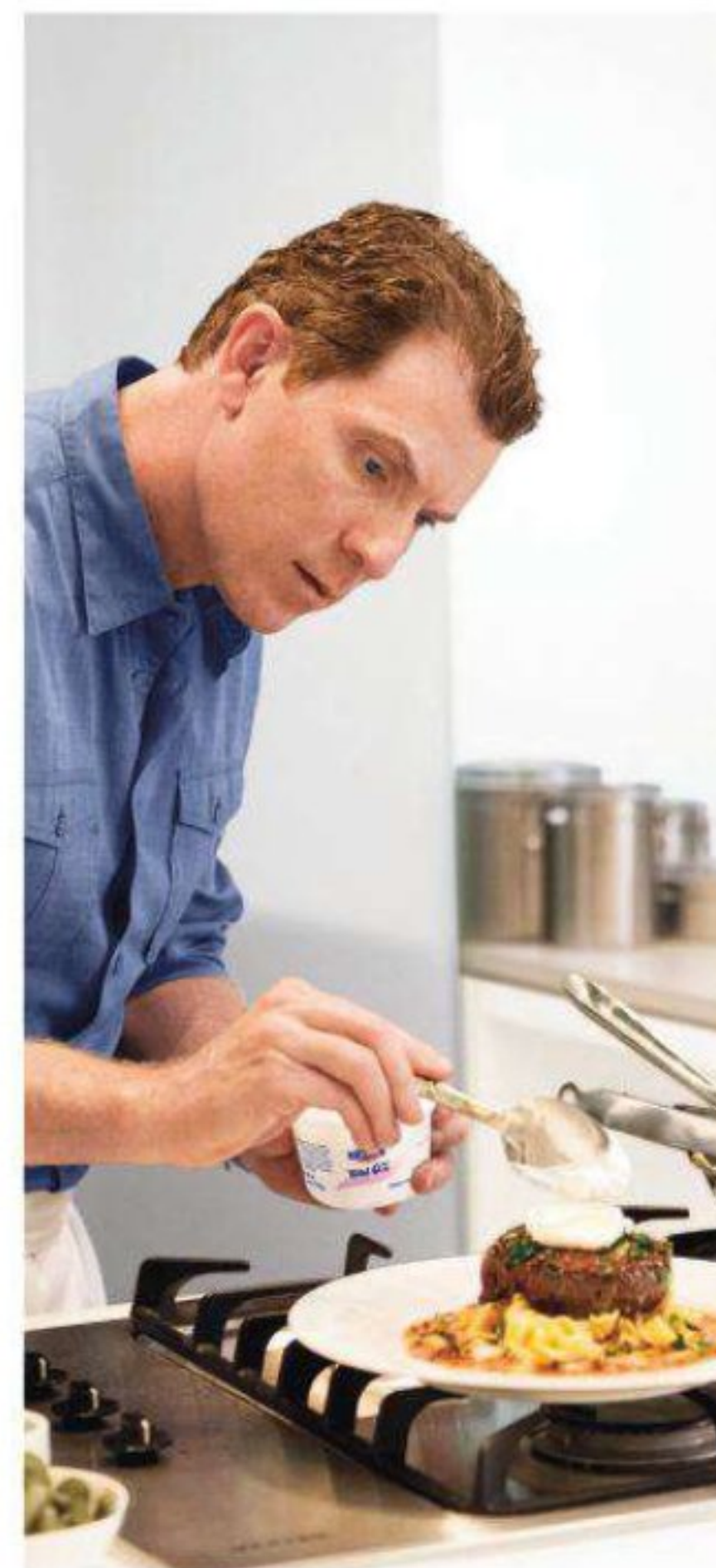
MAKES ABOUT 5 DOZEN

Copious amounts of crunchy, buttery macadamia nuts find their match in large, creamy white chocolate chunks in these classic American cookies (pictured on [page 42](#)).

- 2 cups flour
- 1 tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. baking soda
- 1½ cups packed light brown sugar
- 1½ cups sugar
- 16 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 2 eggs
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 1½ lb. roughly chopped white chocolate
- 1 lb. roughly chopped roasted and salted macadamia nuts

1 Whisk together flour, salt, and baking soda in a bowl; set aside. In a large bowl, beat sugars and butter on medium speed of a hand mixer until fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add eggs one at a time, beating after each addition until smooth; beat in vanilla. Add dry ingredients, and beat until just combined; stir in chocolate and nuts.

2 Heat oven to 325°. Using a 1-oz. ice cream scoop or 2 spoons, portion and shape dough into balls, and place balls 2" apart on parchment paper-lined baking sheets. Bake until golden brown, about 14 minutes.



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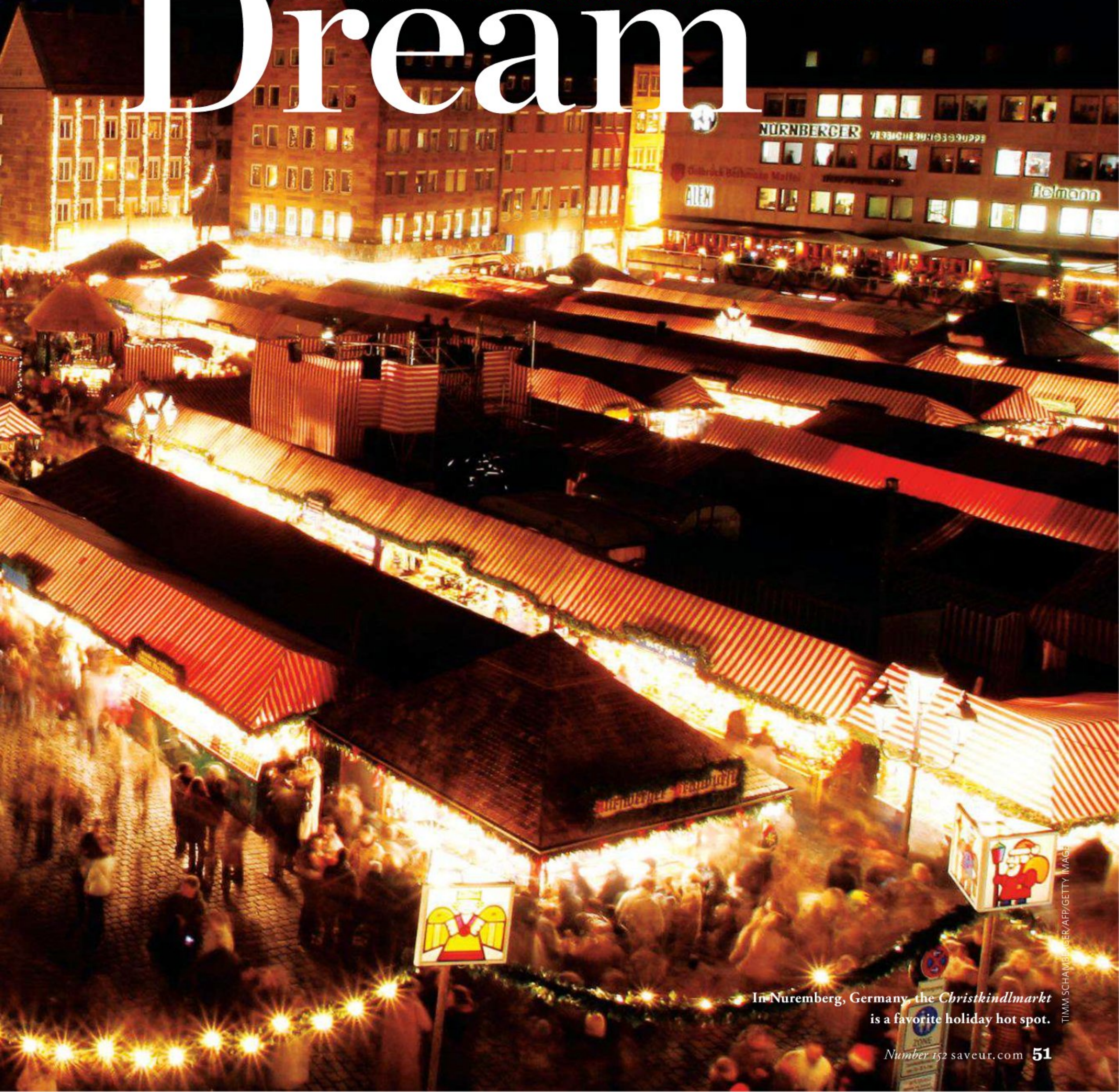
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Dream



In Nuremberg, Germany, the *Christkindlmarkt*
is a favorite holiday hot spot.

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, THE MARKETS FILL WITH THE CLAMOR OF EXCITED VOICES. CHEEKS ARE ROSIER. EYES ARE WIDER. AT CHRISTMASTIME, GERMANY IS SUFFUSED WITH A SENSE OF TOGETHERNESS

I WAKE UP AT THREE o'clock on Christmas morning in my hotel in Nuremberg, a plate of half-eaten Christmas cookies beside me on the bed. The TV is still on. It's a news program. On-screen, hundreds of men are donning Santa suits, wiggling white beards into place as they file into an auditorium and take their seats in front of pointer-wielding instructors. From what I can gather with my limited German, thousands of Berliners are training en masse to be Saint Nick so they can be sent out to delight the city's children. Eventually I turn off the TV and fall back asleep. When I wake up again a few hours later, ready to celebrate my first Christmas in Germany in 26 years, I can't help but wonder if those Santas were just a dream.

Christmastime in Germany can have that effect on a person. It is a more mysterious holiday here than in America—more expressionistic. Think Fritz Lang, not *Miracle on 34th Street*. It exists in a world of shadows: parties in arched-ceiling wine cellars; snow-covered castle ruins bathed in moonlight; and candlelit meals of gravy-drenched roasts, crispy potato pancakes slathered with applesauce, and cream-covered baked apples, all of it awash in the glow of smiling faces and twinkling eyes reflected in wineglasses and beer steins.

Nearly every city in Germany erects a Christmas market in its main square in early December. Part medieval village, part bohemian shantytown, the mazes of stalls proffer

food and holiday bric-a-brac and become the nerve center for a monthlong frenzy of festivity. Night after night, the markets fill with the clamor of excited, cheerful voices; the scent of mulled wine; the aroma of nutmeg-spiked sausages frying under piles of sweet onions; and warm, comfy body heat. Cheeks are rosier. Eyes are wider. At Christmastime, Germany is a country suffused with a sense of togetherness.

I lived in Germany for seven years as a child—in four different apartments. I was the son of a career Air Force officer, from nowhere, wanting to be from somewhere. Anywhere. Hardly any of my relatives visited us, either because of a fear of flying or—I don't know why, frankly. I used to pepper my parents with questions about their own hometowns, their siblings, their friends, the schools they went to, hoping to manufacture some kind of family history.

Christmas helped fill the void. I escaped into the holiday as some would into book. A Dungeons & Dragons geek, I reveled in the season's rituals and symbols, which seemed more ancient and mystical than those I remembered from America. Each year, I tacked an Advent calendar to my bedroom door, and the first thing I did every morning, religiously, from the first to the twenty-fourth of December, was open one of its compartments, take out a piece of chocolate molded into the shape of a goose or a candle, and pop it into my mouth like it was a communion wafer.

Each December 5, my younger brother,

Casey, and I, would follow the local kids' tradition and set our snow boots outside the front door to await Saint Nicholas. The next morning they would be full of candy, lumps of coal, and wooden switches—seasonal tidings mixed with a Germanic hint of rebuke—a reminder that we'd been both good and bad. There were a few family traditions my parents had brought over from the States, like making a Christmas Eve pizza with green and red bell peppers, but it was the rituals of the German holiday, with its curious mix of joy and *Sturm und Drang*, that made the most lasting impression on me.

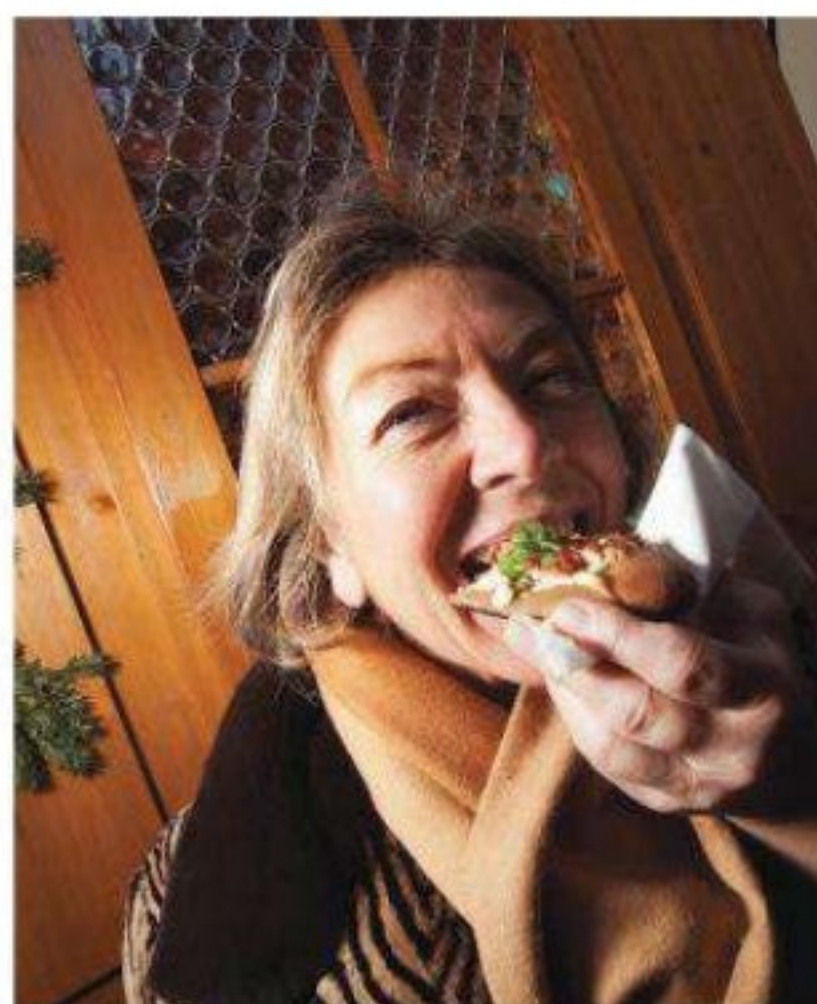
In the quarter century since I left Germany, I've started my own family, with its own Yuletide traditions, but I've never been able to find that old magic and mystery again. There was always something missing from the holiday, which made it feel like there was something missing inside me, too. I needed to go back.

I'VE DECIDED TO SPEND the holiday in Germany's tradition-bound heart: Bavaria. I've been invited to a pre-Christmas dinner at the home of Hans-Peter Drexler and his wife, Brigitte, in the snowbound village of Fischbachau, about 40 miles outside of Munich. In the kitchen, Brigitte, dressed in a dirndl, is mixing a dough of bread and onion to make *semmelknödel* (caraway-scented bread dumplings). She eases the dumplings into a pot of boiling water; they sink to the bottom and then bob to the surface, knocking gently against the sides of the pot and each other.

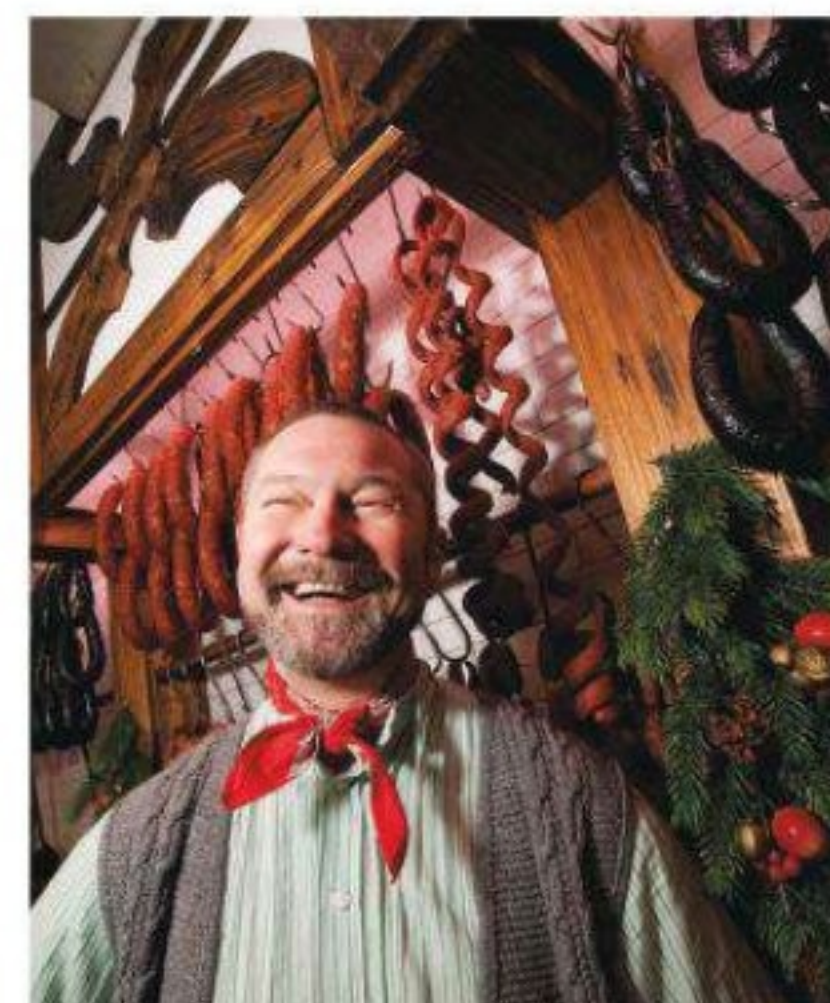
Hans-Peter is the brewmaster of the venerable Weisses Bräuhaus G. Schneider & Sohn brewery. My friend Garrett Oliver, the brewmaster of Brooklyn Brewery and an old acquaintance of Hans-Peter's, introduced us by e-mail. Darting back and forth in the kitchen, and also dressed in their Christmasy Bavarian best, are the Drexlers' children: Michael, Peter, Max, and Thomas. Each is in charge of making a particular dish: Max is making the *schwarzwurzelsuppe* (a black salsify soup drizzled with sour cream and pumpkin seed oil); Peter is helping with the *bratäpfel mit walnusseis* (baked apples and stuffed walnuts with riesling sauce); and Michael, the oldest son, is tending to the *wildschwein mit rüben-gemüse* (roasted wild boar with bacon and juniper berries, served with root vegetables) using his great-great-grandfa- (continued on [page 56](#))

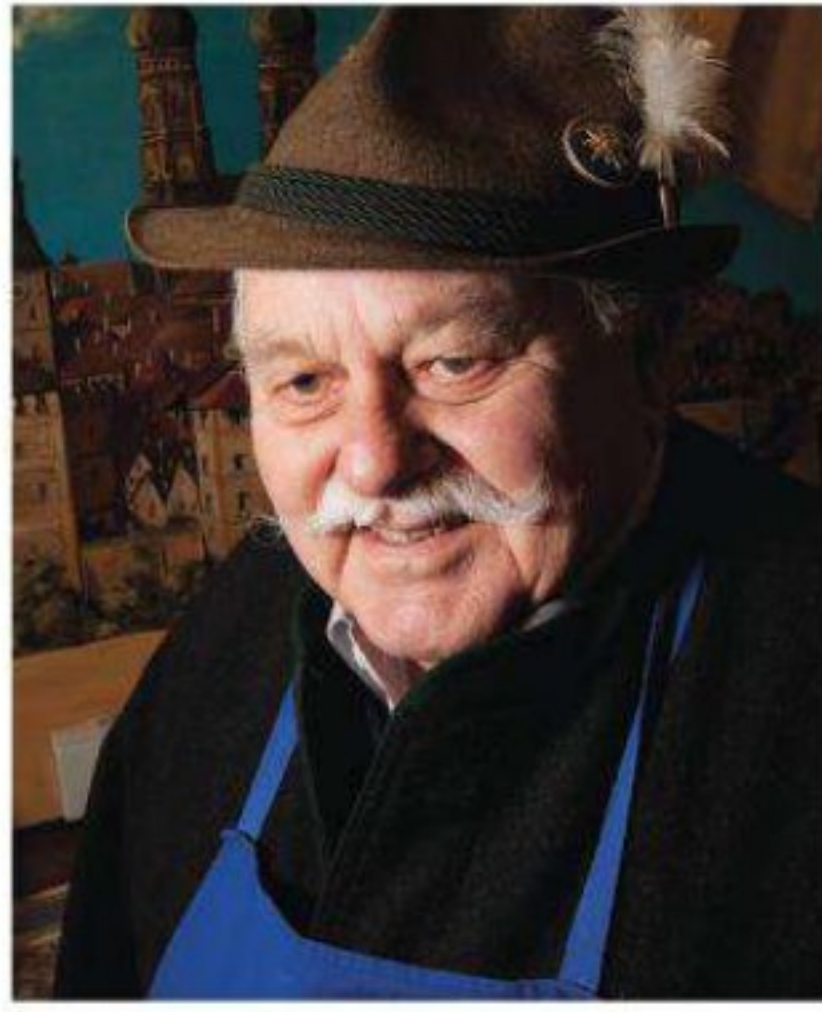
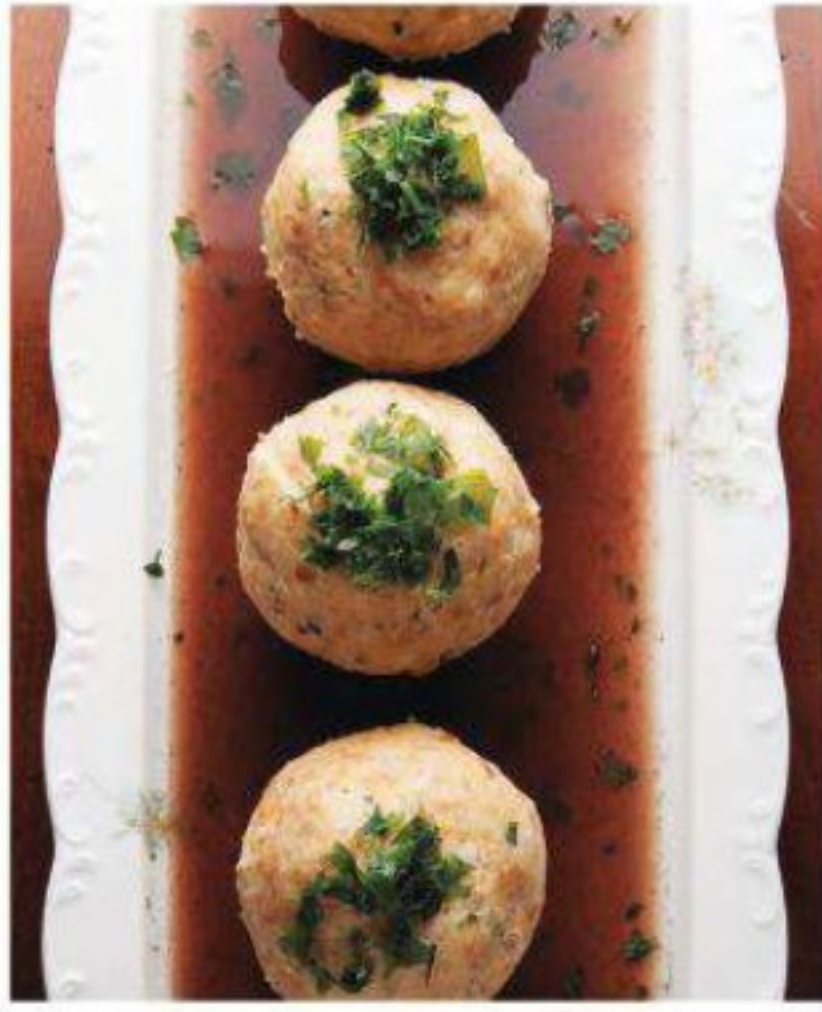
Braised pork roast with root vegetables (see [page 62](#) for a recipe).





Clockwise, from top left: Hans-Peter Drexler holds a few mache and goat cheese salads; Christmas market revelers in Nuremberg warm themselves with hot spiced wine; a Saint Nicholas decoration; a German Christmas dinner still life; a sausage vendor in the *Viktualienmarkt*; the Drexler family at Christmas dinner; potato pancakes with applesauce at the Nuremberg *Christkindlesmarkt*; a happy customer eating stuffed bread in Munich. Center: two workers at the Neef bakery in Nuremberg.





Clockwise, from top left: *Semmelknödel*, or Bavarian bread dumplings, in gravy; a sweets vendor in Munich; a baker at Rischart in Munich prepares *baumkuchen*, or “tree cake”; Brigitte Drexler makes dumplings; roasted goose, braised red cabbage, and semolina dumpling at the Gasthaus Rottner; Thomas Drexler mashes boiled celery root; *bratäpfel mit walnusseis*, a traditional Christmas dessert; giant pretzels at the Hofbräuhaus beer hall in Munich. Recipes start on [page 62](#).



THIS IS THE TYPE OF FOOD THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER, THE KIND THAT CREATES A BOND. YOU DON'T BUILD LONG-LASTING FRIENDSHIPS OVER STUFFED ZUCCHINI AND CUCUMBER SANDWICHES

(continued from [page 52](#)) ther's hand-carved wooden spoon, while Thomas makes a purée of celery root and cream.

As the dumplings are coming out of the pot, Hans-Peter strides in with a big mug of frothy beer and hands it to me. "You are at the home of the brewmaster!" he bellows. Suddenly, the back door flies open and a pair of dirndl-clad women burst in, bearing cookies and schnapps. "Ah, our neighbors," says Hans-Peter. "They've come to celebrate with us." Later, we all eat together at a big table next to a Christmas tree with wild-looking, spindly branches that are decorated with real lighted candles.

Near the end of the meal, Brigitte puts a plate of the baked apple dessert in front of me. The apple's skin has ruptured and the flesh is spilling out in places, its sugary juices mingling with melting whipped cream. I take a bite, and memories of long-ago Christmases come flooding back. I am suddenly overwhelmed with emotion and thanks. I marvel out loud about the Christmas reverie that they are living. "We have years of tradition in our blood," Hans-Peter replies. "It's like making beer: Unlike what some craft brewers might think, beauty and perfection don't happen overnight." He slaps me on the back.

Late that night I get into my makeshift bed on a banquette next to the glow of the tree. The Drexlers' cat comes in and curls up in the nativity scene, a furry giant amid the tiny figurines. I whisper a good night.

The following evening, Hans-Peter and I drive to Munich for a holiday dinner at the

140-year-old beer hall owned by the Weisse brewery. The air inside is tangy with the sweet-and-sour smell of gravy and lager. The rafters of the sprawling room—reverberating with the roar of some 400 revelers—are festooned with garlands of pine boughs and thick red ribbons. The chef, a bear of a man named Joseph Nagler, greets us when we arrive and leads us to a table. When we shake hands, I notice that the chef's are the size of flapjacks. When I mention this to Hans-Peter, he says, "He probably had to show his hands when he interviewed! It is so he can make the big dumplings!"

The food *is* big. Piled on a plate that Chef Nagler has placed before us are formidable roasted pork shanks in a glossy lake of brown sauce alongside fat semolina dumplings. I cut into one of the dumplings, and a cloud of steam escapes. The inside is still creamy. With the first bite, a smile spreads across my face. The dumpling is deeply savory yet warmly spiced, with a flavor that fills me from top to bottom. This is the type of food that brings people together, the kind that creates a bond. You don't build long-lasting friendships over stuffed zucchini and cucumber sandwiches. When the chef returns to our table, I thank him effusively. "We are all one big family here!" he says, spreading his arms and gazing around the room.

True enough. As the night progresses, I effortlessly fall into conversation with the people sitting around us. Toward the end of the evening, I chat with a group of retirees at their

stammtisch, or locals' table. They regale me with stories of Christmases past. On my way out the door, a man in a Santa suit brushes past me and flashes the peace sign.

The next morning, I'm on a train to Nuremberg, Bavaria's second-largest city, rocking out to Ray Coniff's version of "O, Tannenbaum" on my headphones and eating a giant, salt-crusted pretzel smeared with butter. As a snow-covered landscape of forested hills rolls by, I'm growing giddy with anticipation. Today I will visit Nuremberg's *Christkindlesmarkt*, one of the oldest Christmas markets in the world, and the site of memorable visits when I was a child.

Soon I'm walking over the slippery cobblestone streets that wind down from my hotel to the market square. I turn a corner and enter a maelstrom. The market is teeming with people, literally shoulder to shoulder, just like I remember. It's all still here: the twinkling lights, the medieval turrets towering over the square, the candy-striped stall tents filled with sauerkraut steam, the brigades of nutcracker soldiers, the cauldrons of mulled wine. Suddenly I'm a kid again.

A friend in Munich suggested I have lunch at a place close to the square called the Bratwursthäusle. A mass of people is pushing me upstream, and eventually I follow a tributary that leads me right to the restaurant, which resembles an alpine cottage. The dining room is rowdy, and redolent of nutmeg, sawdust, and searing sausages. I was told to ask for Werner Behringer, the owner. I do, and presently a man appears before me, looking for all the world like a Bavarian version of Merv Griffin.

By way of greeting, Herr Behringer gives me a wink, puts his arm around my shoulder, and ushers me to a nearby table already crowded with diners. A few minutes later, he returns bearing plates of small, intensely spiced Nuremberger sausages, creamy potato salad, and a pile of sauerkraut studded with whole spices. And now comes a mug of beer. It is the size of a toddler. "Just a drop," Herr Behringer says, laughing, and then disappearing into the crowd. I don't know any of the people I'm sitting with. At any other time of the year they'd be strangers, but not today. We toast each other and talk, eat, and drink into the afternoon's waning hours.

FINALLY, IT IS CHRISTMAS Day. A ruddy-faced, musta- (continued on [page 60](#))

Rumtopf, macerated fruit conserve and ice cream (see [page 62](#) for a recipe).





Nuremberg-style almond spice cookies. Facing page: An assortment of German Christmas cookies at Rischart bakery in Munich. From left: chocolate-dipped coconut macaroons; cinnamon and kirsch star cookies; raspberry jam sandwich cookies; anise seed crescent cookies; chocolate-dipped shortbread cookies; chocolate-dipped hazelnut cookies. (See page 64 for recipes.)



(continued from page 56) chioed man named Stefan Rottner has just brought me a glass of something ruby-colored and sparkling. "This is champagne with fruit syrup," he says. The syrup was made from macerated berries, apples, and currants that his 85-year-old grandmother jarred last summer.

When I asked my German friends back home where I should have Christmas dinner in Bavaria, they told me to come here, to Gasthaus Rottner. The restaurant, just outside Nuremberg, was established in 1812 and has been in Chef Stefan's family ever since. It is just the type of place I remember from my childhood—half-timbered facade, painted, striped wooden shutters, with a coat of arms over the entrance—a Hansel and Gretel fairy tale come to life.

"It is an über-Christmas in Germany!" says the chef as we sit down to dinner amid other families who have come to his restaurant for their holiday meal.

We eat crisp-skinned roast goose with



red cabbage, a traditional Christmas Day dish. "Today it is goose," says Chef Stefan. "Tomorrow it is venison."

Later, as we're finishing our desserts, Stefan says he's surprised that I've chosen to spend the holiday without my family. "I can't imagine being away from home for the Christmas season," he says. "We have such a strong feeling for this. I remember in 1956 when my brother, Hubert, went down to the main train station on Christmas Eve to give presents to the homeless. My father didn't understand what he was doing. But Hubert just said he wanted the lonely persons to feel happy." I tell Herr Rottner that I'm not lonely at all. I tell him how happy I am at this very moment—to be home for Christmas. 🐾

TRAVEL GUIDE MUNICH AND NUREMBERG

Dinner for two with drinks and tip: Inexpensive Under \$20 Moderate \$20–\$80 Expensive Over \$80

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Rottner

Winterstrasse 15-17 Nuremberg
Grossreuth bei Schweinau (49/911-658-480; rottner-hotel.de). Rates: \$149 Double. At this comfortable hotel (pictured at right), located on a working farm on the out-



skirts of Nuremberg, owner and chef Stefan Rottner offers cooking classes to guests and shows food films in a barn-turned-movie theater. Gasthaus Rottner, a convivial pub next door, serves farm-to-table fare such as roast goose.

Hotel Admiral München

Kohlstrasse 9, Munich (49/8921-6350; info@hotel-admiral.de). Rates: \$160 Double. Located on a quiet side street in downtown Munich, this 32-room, family-run hotel is cozy and old-fashioned in all the best ways, with heavy brass keys for the rooms and a delicious German breakfast of eggs, cold cuts, and assorted cheeses served in the bustling parlor.

WHERE TO EAT

Augustiner Zur Schranke

Beim Tiergärtner 3, Nuremberg (49/911/225-474). Inexpensive. This little restaurant just inside the walls of Keiserburg Castle offers an impressive array of beers on tap and food to match: roasted pork shoulder, bacon dumplings, and braised cabbage, all proffered in a warm, old-fashioned dining room.

Bratwursthäusle

Rathausplatz 6, Nuremberg (49/911/227-695; die-nuernberger-bratwurst.de). Moderate. At this definitive place for the thin, highly spiced sausages for which Nuremberg is famous, the brats are roasted on a grill in the mid-

dle of the dining room, then served piping hot with creamy potato salad and sauerkraut (pictured, at left).

"Die Alm" im Mandarin Oriental

Neuturmstrasse 1, Munich (49/89/290-980; mandarinoriental.com/munich). Moderate. Fine dining takes on traditional fare—bread and butter blanketed in fresh chopped chives; veal with parsleyed potatoes and cranberries—are offered in a seasonal pop-up chalet (complete with man-made snow) on the roof of the Mandarin Oriental hotel.

Hofbräuhaus München

Platzl 9, Munich (49/89/2901-3610; hofbraeuhaus.de). Inexpensive. Owned by the Bavarian government, this cavernous, 420-year-old beer hall has a dedicated following in



Munich: hundreds of patrons keep their personal beer steins on premises in a specially designed locker. The menu is solidly old-school, with house-made weisswurst, braised pork knuckles and sauerkraut, and enormous German pretzels.

Weisse Bräuhaus

Tal 7 80331 Munich (49/89/290-1380; weisses-brauhaus.de). Moderate. Two stories of hearty Bavarian fare are on tap in this former brewery. It's a great place to sample Munich's second breakfast, served after breakfast but before lunch, of weisswurst and beer. At night, it morphs into a mini Oktoberfest with beer-friendly food like roasted pork shanks with dumplings and gravy, and of course, bratwurst.



WHAT TO DO

Kremmer Joseph Bäckerei

Kirchstrasse 2, Elbach (49/80/28817). Just outside of Nuremberg, this tiny, quintessentially German bakery (pictured, at center), operated by the same family for five generations, is packed to the rafters with delicious things to eat. Try the fresh-baked fruit-flecked stollen or the jelly doughnuts.

Marienplatz Christkindlesmarkt

November 30–December 24, Marienplatz, Munich (muenchen.de). At the foot of St. Mary's Cathedral, hundreds of stalls sell toys and seasonal goodies like kletznbrot (a dense fruit-and-nut loaf), baked apples, and hot spiced wine. Every evening during the Christmas season, carolers sing from the Town Hall balcony above the market.

Nuremberg Christkindlesmarkt

November 30–December 24, Hauptmarkt, Nuremberg (christkindlesmarkt.de). This sprawling market, going strong since the mid-16th century, is one of Germany's oldest. Nearly 200 stalls sell toys, ornaments, fruitcake, and other holiday items, while vendors peddling grilled sausages, rum punch, and glühwein ensure that no one shops hungry.

Rischart's Café Zimtstern

Marienplatz 18 a (089 2317000; rischart.de). Every December, the staff at the Munich bakery Rischart erects a tent out front, where they offer children's baking lessons and seasonal sweets: Christmas cookies, baumkuchen ("tree cake"), made by brushing layers of batter onto a spit.

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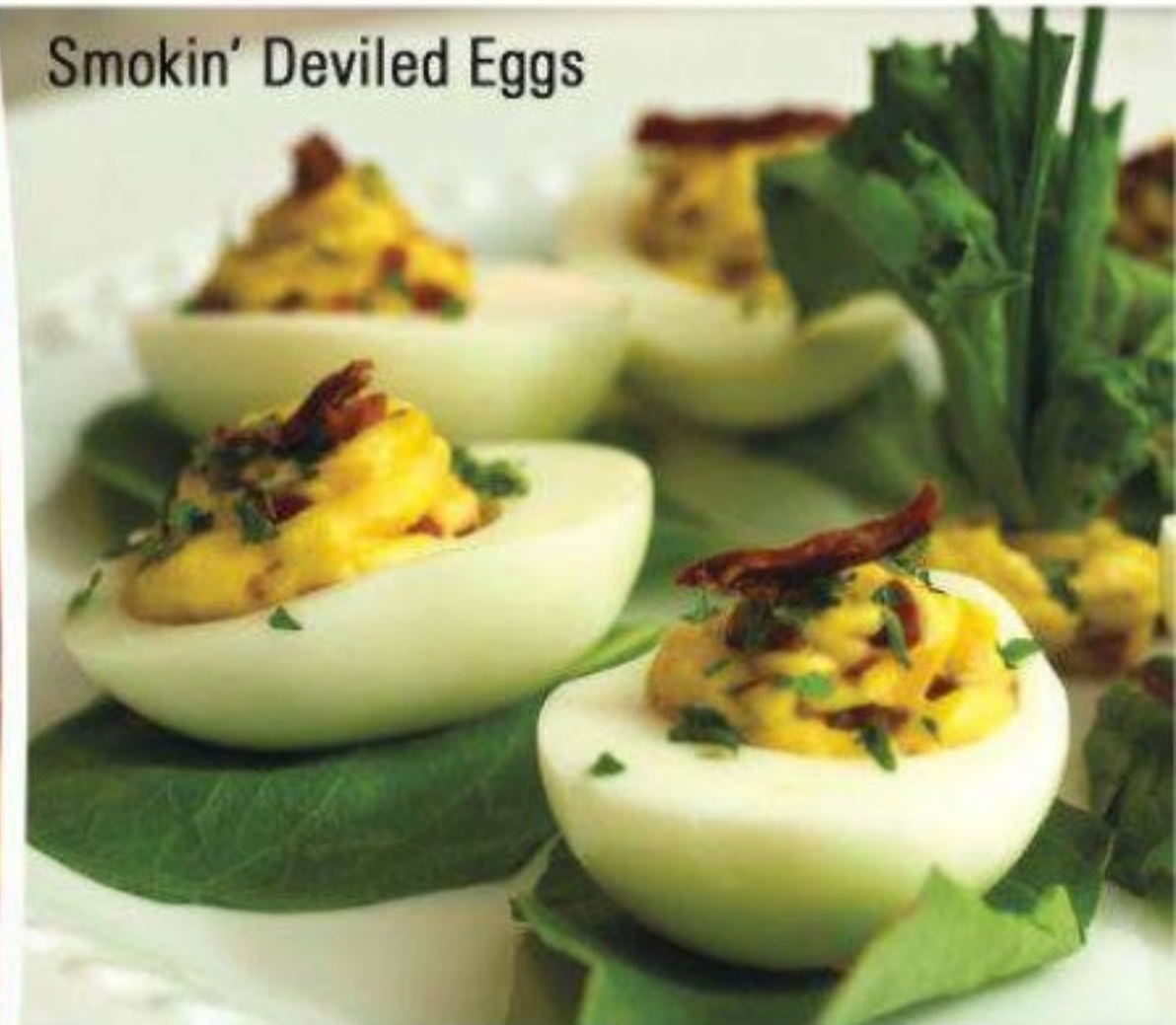


Champagne Chicken

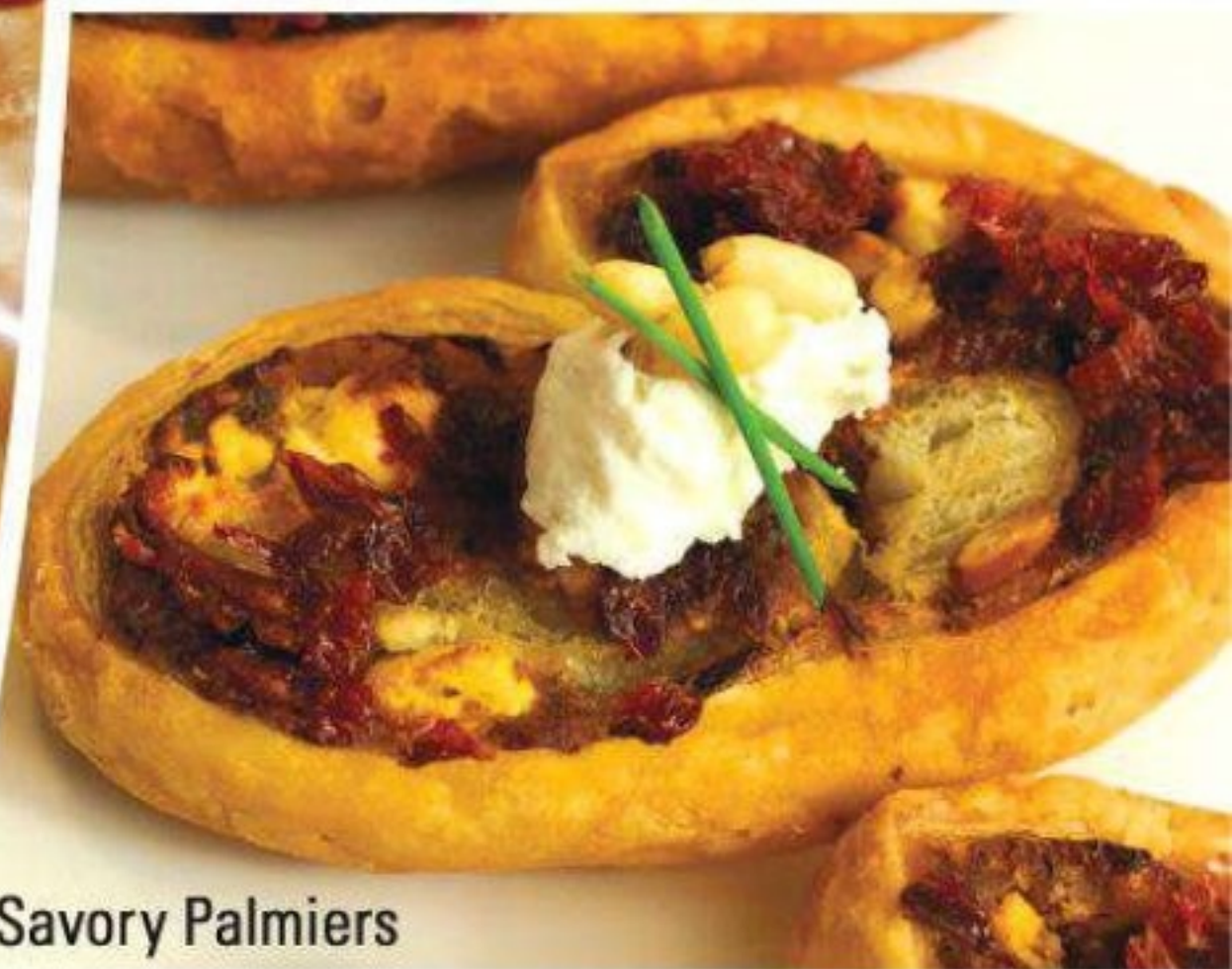
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★ Laugenbrezel

(Traditional German Pretzels)

MAKES 2 LARGE PRETZELS

At the Hofbräuhaus beer hall in Munich, these giant pretzels (pictured on [page 55](#)), which have a similar chew to bagels, are served with soft butter.

- 1½ **tbsp. barley malt syrup** (see [page 92](#))
- 1 **¼-oz. package active dry yeast**
- 3 **unsalted butter, softened, plus more for serving**
- 4 **cups flour, plus more for dusting**
- ¼ **tsp. kosher salt**
- 2 **tbsp. baking soda**
- Coarse salt, for sprinkling**

1 Heat a baking stone in an oven to 500°. Stir together syrup, yeast, and 1½ cups warm water in a large bowl, and let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes. Add butter, flour, and salt, and stir until dough forms. Transfer to a lightly floured work surface, and knead until smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes. Halve dough, and working with one piece at a time, roll dough into a 4' rope, about 1" thick. Transfer rope to the bottom edge of a sheet of parchment paper, and keeping the center of the rope on the paper, pick up both ends, cross one end over the other, about 2" from the ends, and twist; attach each end to the sides of the pretzel. Repeat with remaining dough, and set aside to rest for 20 minutes.

2 Bring baking soda and 1 cup water to a simmer in a 2-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring constantly until baking soda dissolves. Brush each pretzel generously with the baking soda solution, sprinkle with coarse salt, and using a sharp paring knife, make a 6" slash, about ¼" deep across the bottom edge of the pretzel. Working one at a time, slide pretzel on parchment paper onto the stone; bake until dark brown, about 15 minutes. Repeat with remaining pretzel. Let cool for about 10 minutes; serve warm with butter.

★ Kartoffelpuffer

(Potato Pancakes)

MAKES 8 PANCAKES

Applesauce is the perfect foil for these savory, golden fried pancakes, a mix of starchy potatoes, flour, and eggs (pictured on [page 54](#)).

- 3 **large russet potatoes** (about 2½ lb.)
- 2 **medium yellow onions**
- ⅓ **cup flour**

- 3 **eggs**
- Kosher salt, to taste**
- Ground white pepper, to taste**
- Canola oil, for frying**
- Applesauce, for serving**

1 Peel potatoes and onions, and finely grate using a box grater. Place in a strainer set over a bowl and let drain, squeezing mixture until dry; transfer to another bowl. Slowly pour off the water from squeezing the potatoes until you reach the milky starch at the bottom of the bowl; pour this on top of the drained potato mixture. Add flour and eggs, and season with salt and white pepper; mix until evenly combined.

2 Heat ¼ cup oil in an 8" skillet over medium heat. Working in batches, measure out ½ cup potato mixture, and use your hands to flatten it into a 4–5" pancake; add to skillet, and fry, flipping once, until golden brown and cooked through, about 8 minutes. Transfer to a paper towel-lined baking sheet, and repeat with more oil, as needed, and remaining potato mixture. Serve pancakes with applesauce on the side.

Rumtopf

(Macerated Fruit Conserve)

MAKES ABOUT 7 CUPS

This sweet-tart conserve is a luscious accompaniment to ice cream (pictured on [page 57](#)). It also adds a fruity dimension when stirred into champagne.

- 12 **oz. pitted sour cherries** (see [page 92](#))
- 12 **oz. peeled, cored, quartered, and sliced tart apples, Fuji, Gala, or Granny Smith**
- 6 **oz. blackberries**
- 6 **oz. fresh red currants**
- 2 **cups sugar**
- 2 **cups brandy, plus more**
- Vanilla ice cream, for serving**
- Pumpkin seed oil and mint sprigs, to garnish**

1 Place cherries, apples, blackberries, currants, sugar and brandy in a sterilized 2-qt. glass jar and shake to combine; seal jar with a lid. Let sit at room temperature until fruit is soft and the liquid around fruit is stained red, at least 48 hours. Refrigerate for up to a month.

2 To serve, ladle a spoonful of fruit into a serving dish, and top with a scoop of ice cream; drizzle with oil, garnish with mint and serve immediately.

Schweineschmorbraten mit Rübensgemüse

(Braised Pork Roast with Root Vegetables)

SERVES 6–8

The juniper berries and caraway seeds in this roast (pictured on [page 53](#)) give it a floral, woodsy flavor, while the bacon that wraps it helps keep the meat moist.

- 1 **5-lb. boneless pork shoulder, butterflied**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- 2 **tbsp. whole juniper berries**
- 4½ **tsp. caraway seeds**
- 8 **cloves garlic, roughly chopped**
- 8 **strips bacon**
- ¼ **cup olive oil**
- 3 **medium parsnips, peeled and cut into 1" chunks**
- 3 **medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1" chunks**
- 1 **large russet potato, peeled and cut into 1" chunks**
- 1 **small celery root, peeled and cut into 1" chunks**
- 1 **medium yellow onion, cut into 1" chunks**
- ½ **cup dry red wine**
- 1½ **cups chicken stock**
- 6 **sprigs thyme**
- 3 **bay leaves**
- 2 **tbsp. cornstarch**
- 2 **tbsp. red wine vinegar**

1 Heat oven to 350°. Season pork with salt and pepper, rub with juniper, caraway, and garlic, and lay 4 strips bacon across pork, parallel to short sides and spaced about 2" apart. Starting at one of the short edges, roll pork into a tight bundle, and place seam-side down; lay remaining bacon lengthwise across the top of the roast, and tie securely with kitchen twine at 1" intervals. Season outside of pork with salt and pepper, and set aside.

2 Heat oil in a large roasting pan set over two burners over medium-high heat. Place roast, bacon side down, in pan, and cook, turning as needed, until browned all over, about 25 minutes. Push roast to one side of the pan, and add parsnips, carrots, potato, celery root, and onion, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 15 minutes. Add wine, and cook, stirring to scrape the bottom of the pan, until liquid is reduced by half, about 2 minutes. Add stock, thyme, and bay leaves, and using tongs, arrange roast on top of vegetables. Cover with foil, and roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the roast reads 165°, about 2 hours.

3 Transfer pork to a cutting board, and let rest for 20 minutes. Discard bay leaves and thyme, and arrange vegetables on a large serving platter; slice pork, and arrange over vegetables.

4 Bring roasting pan with pan juices to a boil over high heat. Mix cornstarch and 2 tbsp. water in a bowl. When juices boil, whisk in cornstarch mixture and cook until gravy is thick, about 2 minutes more. Strain gravy through a fine-mesh strainer, stir in vinegar, and season with salt and pepper; serve alongside roast.

★ Semmelknödel

(Bavarian Bread Dumplings)

MAKES ABOUT 14 DUMPLINGS

Bavarian home cook Brigitte Drexler's soul-satisfying bread dumplings (pictured on [page 55](#)) are great for sopping up the rich pork gravy from the braised roast (see above).

- 5 **kaiser rolls** (about 1 lb.), **thinly sliced**
- 3 **tbsp. olive oil**
- 1 **small yellow onion, minced**
- 2 **cups milk**
- ¼ **cup minced parsley, plus more to garnish**
- ¼ **cup flour**
- ½ **tsp. freshly grated nutmeg**
- 3 **eggs, lightly beaten**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**
- Hot pork gravy, from braised pork recipe, above, for serving**

1 Heat oven to 325°. Spread sliced rolls onto 2 baking sheets, and bake until slightly dry, about 12 minutes; transfer to a large bowl, and set aside.

2 Heat oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion, and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, about 10 minutes; transfer to the bowl with the bread, and set aside. Add milk to the saucepan; bring to a boil over high heat, and pour over bread. Add parsley, flour, nutmeg, and eggs; season with salt and pepper, and using your hands, mix until evenly combined.

2 Bring an 8-qt. saucepan of salted water to a boil over high heat. Moisten hands with cold water, and form bread mixture into 2" balls (about 4 oz. each); set aside. Working in batches, add balls to boiling water, and cook until firm, about 15 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, drain briefly on paper towels, and transfer to a serving platter; sprinkle with parsley, and serve in bowls surrounded by gravy.

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Bratäpfel mit Walnusseis

(Baked Walnut-Stuffed Apples
with White Wine)

SERVES 6

Apples are roasted in wine and butter for this dessert (pictured on [page 55](#)), a staple of holiday markets throughout Germany.

- ¾ cup raisins
- ¾ cup walnut halves, chopped
- ¾ cup packed light brown sugar
- ¼ cup dark rum
- 4 tsp. kosher salt
- 6 tart apples, such as Gala
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed
- ½ cup honey
- 1½ tbsp. ground cinnamon
- Whipped cream, for serving

Heat oven to 350°. Combine raisins, walnuts, sugar, rum, and salt in a bowl; set aside. Core apples, and place right-side up in a 9" x 13" baking dish. Fill each apple with ¼ cup walnut mixture, add wine and butter to baking dish, and drizzle each apple with honey; cover tightly with foil, and bake until apples are tender, about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Uncover, sprinkle with cinnamon and let cool slightly; serve in bowls with pan sauce and a dollop of whipped cream on the side.

Cookies

The recipes for these Christmas cookies (pictured on [pages 58](#) and [59](#)) come from the bakery Rischart in Munich.

Schokoladen-Butter-plätzchen

(Chocolate-Dipped Shortbread Cookies)

MAKES ABOUT 2½ DOZEN

- 12 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 2 cups flour, plus more for dusting
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 4 oz. semisweet chocolate, melted
- Multicolored nonpareils, to decorate

Heat oven to 400°. Beat butter, sugar, and vanilla in a bowl with a hand mixer on medium-high speed until fluffy. Add flour and salt; beat. Transfer dough to a floured work surface, form into a disk, and roll until 1⅓" thick. Using a 1¾" star cutter, cut out cookies; transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2" apart. Bake until brown, 6–8 minutes; cool. Dip top

of each cookie in chocolate; decorate with nonpareils. Chill until set.

Lebkuchen

(Chocolate-Glazed Almond Spice Cookies)

MAKES ABOUT 1 DOZEN

- 1½ cups sugar
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 3 eggs
- 10 oz. mixed candied citrus peel, finely chopped
- 8 oz. finely ground almonds
- ¼ cup milk
- 1 tbsp. flour
- 1 tbsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. ground cloves
- ½ tsp. ground cardamom
- ½ tsp. freshly grated nutmeg
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 14 3½" oblaten wafers (see [page 92](#))
- 2 tbsp. light corn syrup
- 4 oz. semisweet chocolate, finely chopped

1 Whisk together 1 cup sugar, vanilla, and eggs in a bowl; using a hand mixer, beat mixture until thickened. Stir in candied peel, almonds, milk, flour, cinnamon, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, and salt. Place a heaping ¼ cup of batter on an oblaten wafer; spread batter to edges, leaving it mounded in center. Repeat with remaining wafers; transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 1" apart. Let sit until slightly dried, about 1 hour.

2 Heat oven to 275°. Bake lebkuchen until a toothpick inserted in the middle of each comes out clean, about 25 minutes. Meanwhile, heat remaining sugar, corn syrup, and ¼ cup water in a 1-qt. saucepan over high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Pour over chocolate; let sit 1 minute. Stir until glaze is shiny. Brush lebkuchen with glaze; let cool to set glaze.

Vanillekipferl

(Anise Seed Crescent Cookies)

MAKES ABOUT 20 COOKIES

- ¾ cup sugar
- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 2 egg yolks
- 2½ cups flour
- 1 tbsp. crushed anise seeds
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 1 egg white, lightly beaten
- Coarse sanding sugar, to decorate

Heat oven to 400°. Beat sugar and butter on medium-high speed of a hand mixer until pale and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Add vanilla and yolks; beat until smooth. Add flour,

anise, and salt; beat until just combined. Pinch off 2-tbsp.-sized pieces of dough, roll each into a cylinder; bend to form a crescent. Place 2" apart on parchment paper-lined baking sheets. Brush with egg white, and sprinkle with sanding sugar. Bake until browned, 8–10 minutes.

Spitzbuben

(Raspberry Jam Sandwich Cookies)

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN

- 1½ cups unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 3½ cups flour, plus more for dusting
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ¾ cup raspberry jam
- Confectioners' sugar, for dusting

1 Heat oven to 325°. Beat butter and sugar with a hand mixer until fluffy. Add vanilla and egg; beat. Add flour and salt; mix. Transfer dough to a floured surface, form into a disk, roll until ¼" thick. Using a 2" fluted round cutter, cut out cookies and transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2" apart. Chill for 30 minutes. Using a 1¼" plain round cutter, cut out centers of half the cookies; discard centers. Bake cookies until lightly browned, 10–12 minutes; cool.

2 Dust cookie rings with confectioners' sugar. Place 1 tsp. jam in center of each whole cookie; spread to within ⅛" of edge. Top each with a cookie ring.

Kokosmakronen

(Chocolate-Dipped Coconut Macaroons)

MAKES ABOUT 2½ DOZEN

- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup heavy cream
- 4 tbsp. unsalted butter, melted
- 1 tbsp. flour
- ½ tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 2 egg whites, plus 1 whole egg
- 2 cups unsweetened, desiccated coconut
- 4 oz. semisweet chocolate, melted

Heat oven to 350°. Whisk together sugar, cream, butter, flour, vanilla, salt, egg whites, and egg in a bowl until smooth; stir in coconut. Transfer to a piping bag fitted with a ¾" fluted tip; pipe 1½"-wide mounds on parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2" apart. Bake until golden brown, about 15 minutes; cool. Dip bottom of each cookie in chocolate;

chill until chocolate sets.

Nusstaler

(Chocolate-Dipped Hazelnut Cookies)

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN

- 8 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tbsp. vanilla extract
- 4 oz. toasted hazelnuts, very finely ground, plus whole raw hazelnuts to garnish
- 2 cups flour
- ½ cup natural cocoa powder
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- 4 oz. semisweet chocolate, melted

Heat oven to 350°. Beat butter, sugar, and vanilla with a hand mixer until fluffy. Whisk together ground hazelnuts, flour, cocoa, and salt in a bowl; add to butter mixture; beat. Portion dough into 1" balls; transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2" apart. Place a whole hazelnut on top of each. Bake until cracked on top, about 10 minutes. Let cool. Dip bottom of each cookie in chocolate; chill until set.

Zimtsterne

(Cinnamon and Kirsch Star Cookies)

MAKES ABOUT 3 DOZEN

- 2 egg whites
- 2½ cups confectioners' sugar
- 1 tbsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 tbsp. kirsch (cherry brandy)
- 2½ cups blanched whole almonds
- 1 cup sugar, plus more for rolling cookies
- ¼ cup rum

1 Whisk egg whites in a bowl to stiff peaks. Whisk in confectioners' sugar to make glaze; pour off ⅔ cup and reserve. Add cinnamon and kirsch to remaining glaze; set aside. Finely grind almonds in a food processor; add granulated sugar and finely grind. Transfer to bowl with spiced glaze; mix into dough.

2 Transfer dough to a surface sprinkled heavily with sugar; cover with parchment paper. Roll dough until ¼" thick. Uncover and spread reserved glaze over dough; let sit until glaze sets, about 30 minutes.

3 Place rum in a bowl, and using a 1¼" star cutter, dip cutter in rum and cut out a cookie; repeat and transfer to parchment paper-lined baking sheets, spaced 2" apart. Let dry for 3 hours. Heat oven to 450°. Bake cookies until glaze just sets but does not brown, 3–4 minutes.

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APPLE, CHEDDAR & WALNUT TOASTS

Makes 24



Ingredients:

- 24 thin slices narrow loaf French Bread
- 2 tart apples, cored and thinly sliced
- 8 ounces Cabot Vermont Sharp Cheddar or Sharp Light Cheddar, grated (about 2 cups)*
- 1 cup walnut pieces

1. Preheat broiler. Arrange bread on baking sheet and toast lightly on both sides under broiler.
2. Remove from broiler and place about two apple slices on each toast. Mound cheese on top. Press walnut pieces into cheese. Return to broiler until cheese and walnuts are lightly colored.

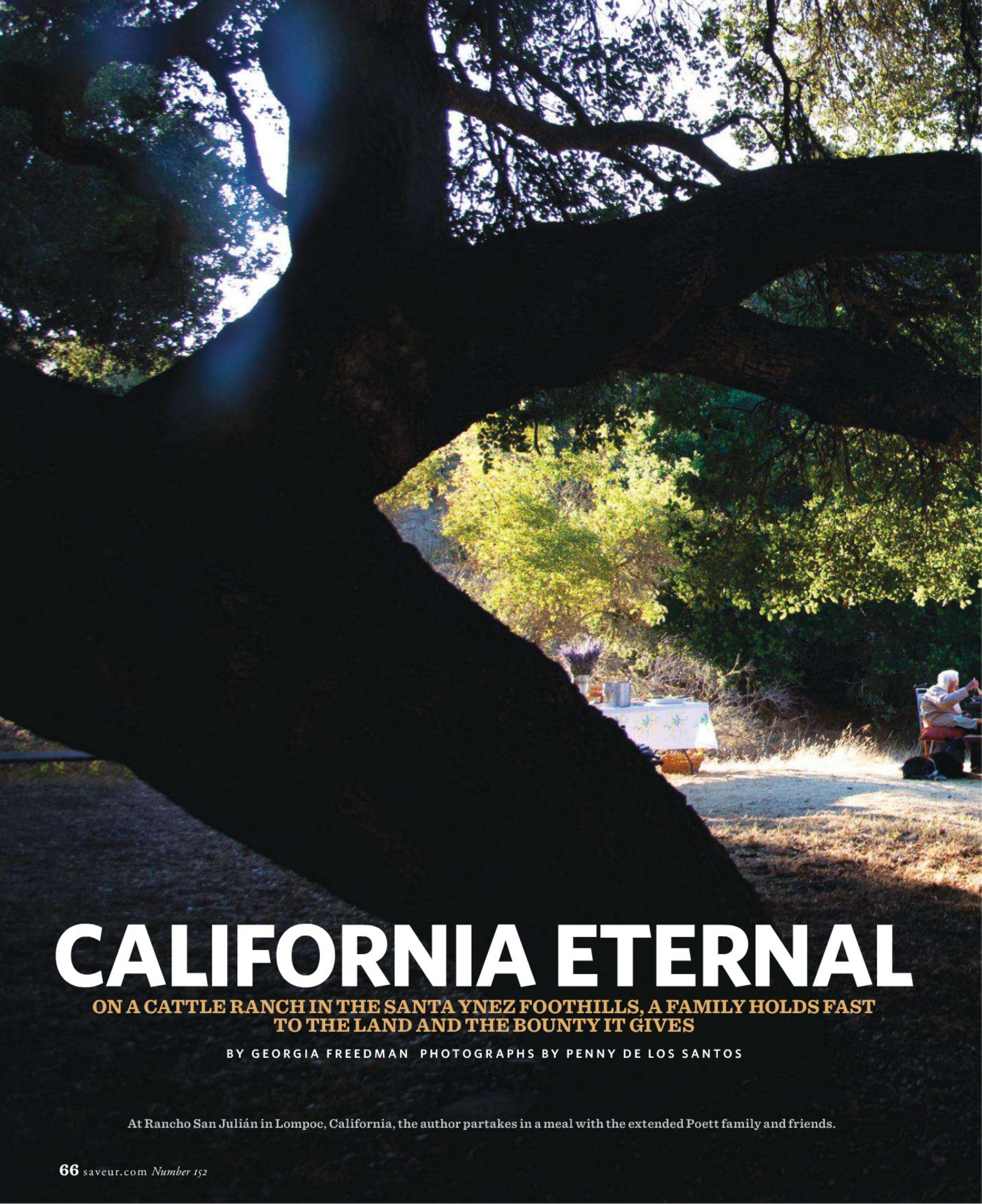
For instant drama, sandwich fresh bay or sage leaves between two identical clear glass plates, available inexpensively from a home store. Set the toasts on top, and add votive candles set into cored red and green apples to the table.

*Nutrition analysis based on using Cabot Vermont Sharp Cheddar.

NUTRITION ANALYSIS: Calories 148, Total Fat 7g, Saturated Fat 3g, Cholesterol 10mg, Sodium 200mg, Carbohydrates 16g, Dietary Fiber 1g, Protein 5g, Calcium 100mg



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**ON A CATTLE RANCH IN THE SANTA YNEZ FOOTHILLS, A FAMILY HOLDS FAST
TO THE LAND AND THE BOUNTY IT GIVES**

BY GEORGIA FREEDMAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY PENNY DE LOS SANTOS

At Rancho San Julián in Lompoc, California, the author partakes in a meal with the extended Poett family and friends.



THIS MEAL IS A HOMECOMING OF SORTS, even though my actual childhood home is 50 miles away. Here, sitting down to supper in the shade of a live oak tree in the grassy heart of the Central Coast, I feel as happy and grounded as a 33-year-old native Californian can be. Perched next to me on the wood bench is one of my oldest friends, Elizabeth Poett, a person I've played with and fought with and shared my greatest joys with and loved for so long that I could almost take her for granted. But I don't. When you've been away from a place like this for a

few years, as I have, you only cherish it more.

Elizabeth went to school with me, down the coast in Santa Barbara, but she grew up here, on the oak-dotted grasslands of Rancho San Julián, a 13,000-acre cattle ranch that has been in her dad's family for nine generations. She is a descendant of José de la Guerra, a commander of the Santa Barbara presidio, who was granted this land in 1837. Now she works full-time on the ranch just like her dad and many of her cousins, who share ownership under a family trust.

I did a lot of growing up here too, spending countless weekends with the Poetts during my school-age years. This is where I learned how to ride a horse, how to mend a fence, and how to scoop the flesh from a ripe avocado and turn it into guacamole.

Today I've made a big batch for old time's sake. This one is in proper California style: studded with chunks of tomato, flecked with cilantro leaves, and amped up with a ton of lime and salt. We eat it with fragrant corn tortillas made by the wife of one of the Mexican ranch hands who lives here full-time.

Elizabeth's parents, Jim and Marianne, are here, too, along with a handful of cousins and friends who live nearby. Jim was one of the first ranchers in this part of California to raise organic beef. Marianne is the founder and editor of a local newspaper. She is also an amazing cook, and though she's not a native Californian, she's one of those transplants who has taken so naturally

to the kind of simple, direct cooking inspired by California's bounty that you'd think she was born here. For me, this meal is the true California cuisine.

Earlier today I helped Marianne and Elizabeth make enchiladas from a recipe that Marianne found in some journals where

tortillas, "you know it's from here." Then she dipped the tortillas in the sauce and rolled them around a filling of sautéed onions, olives, and crumbly cotija cheese. Just like I remember.

Now, as the shadow of the Santa Ynez foothills creeps across the clearing where we eat our

picnic supper, I taste the enchiladas. Their smoky flavor takes me back to Saturday night dinners with Elizabeth and her family when I was 12 years old, after swimming in the creek or riding in the back of her dad's pickup and tossing hay to the cows. I've missed this food more than I knew.

The main course is a Central Coast classic: a juicy, tender beef tri-tip rubbed with salt, pepper, garlic, olive oil, and rosemary. Elizabeth grilled it slow over a hardwood fire she built in her dad's old grill, which has an ingenious suspended rigging system that allows you to raise and lower the grate during cooking, giving the cook control over just how close the meat gets to the fire. The wedge-shaped roast that comes to the table is sheathed in a savory char. Elizabeth slices it into thick steaks, rosy in the middle, and passes the plate around.

There is no part of the cow that can satisfy a Central Coaster like the mighty tri-tip, which is miraculously both lean and rich at the same time. Rancho San Julián sells a lot of tri-tips, among many other cuts of beef, at farmers' markets in Santa Barbara and Santa Monica, all of it from their herd of 500 pasture-raised cattle. With a whole generation having come of age knowing only the taste of corn-fed beef, grass-fed meat has finally made a comeback, Elizabeth tells me as I take a second helping of steak. "Older customers at the farmers' (continued on [page 75](#))



THIS IS WHERE I LEARNED HOW TO RIDE A HORSE, HOW TO MEND A FENCE, AND HOW TO SCOOP THE FLESH FROM A RIPE AVOCADO

Jim's great-aunts and others collected family recipes over the years—Marianne has been translating them from the Spanish. The dish is brilliantly simple, and utterly of this place. The sauce is a smoky purée of local Anaheim and pasilla chiles, and instead of chicken or pork she adds olives, the canned, glossy-black, meaty kind I grew up eating. These California pantry staples, out of fashion elsewhere in the country, are a ubiquitous and beloved ingredient on the Central Coast. "If you see olives in a recipe for enchiladas or tamales," Marianne told me as she fried the

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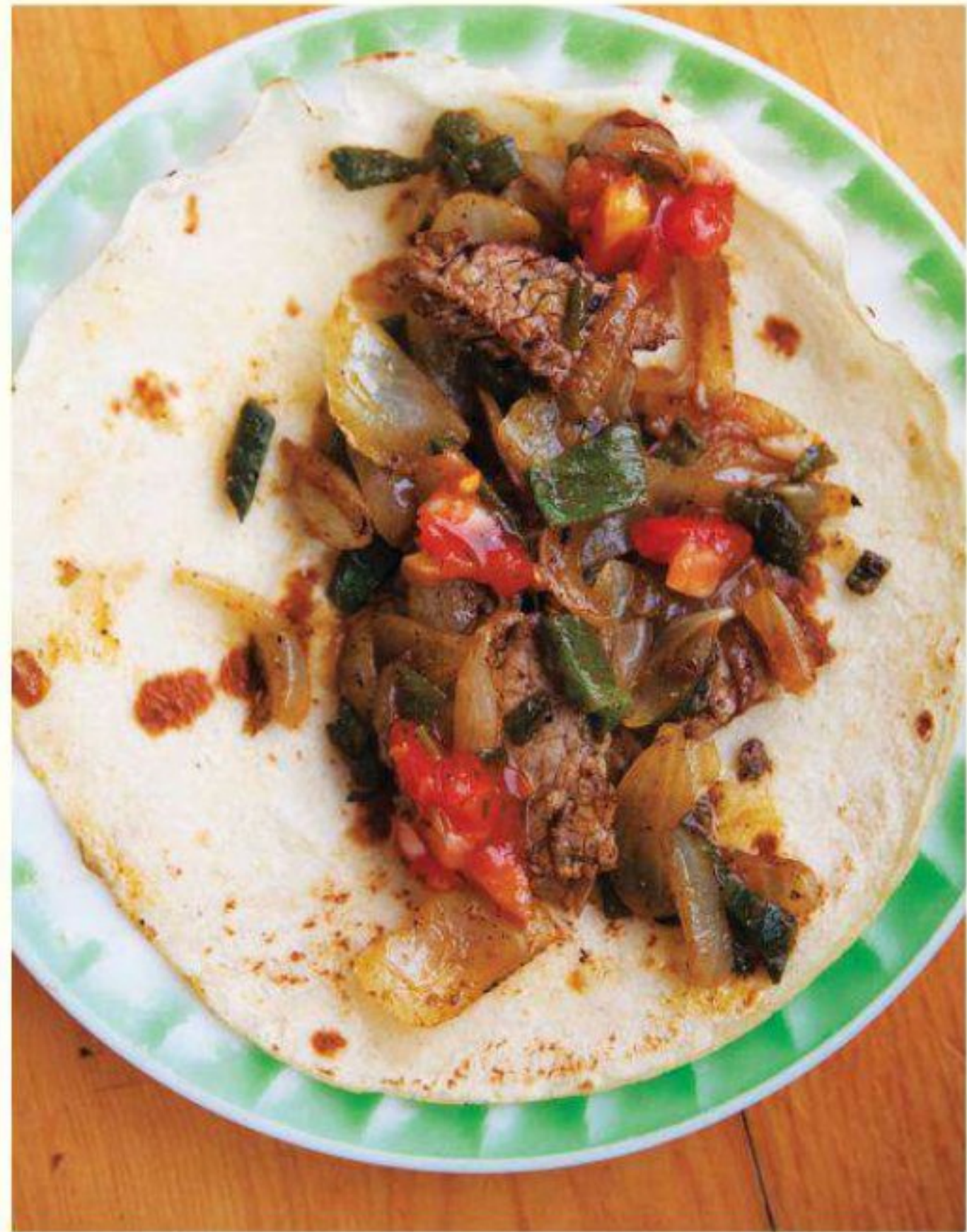
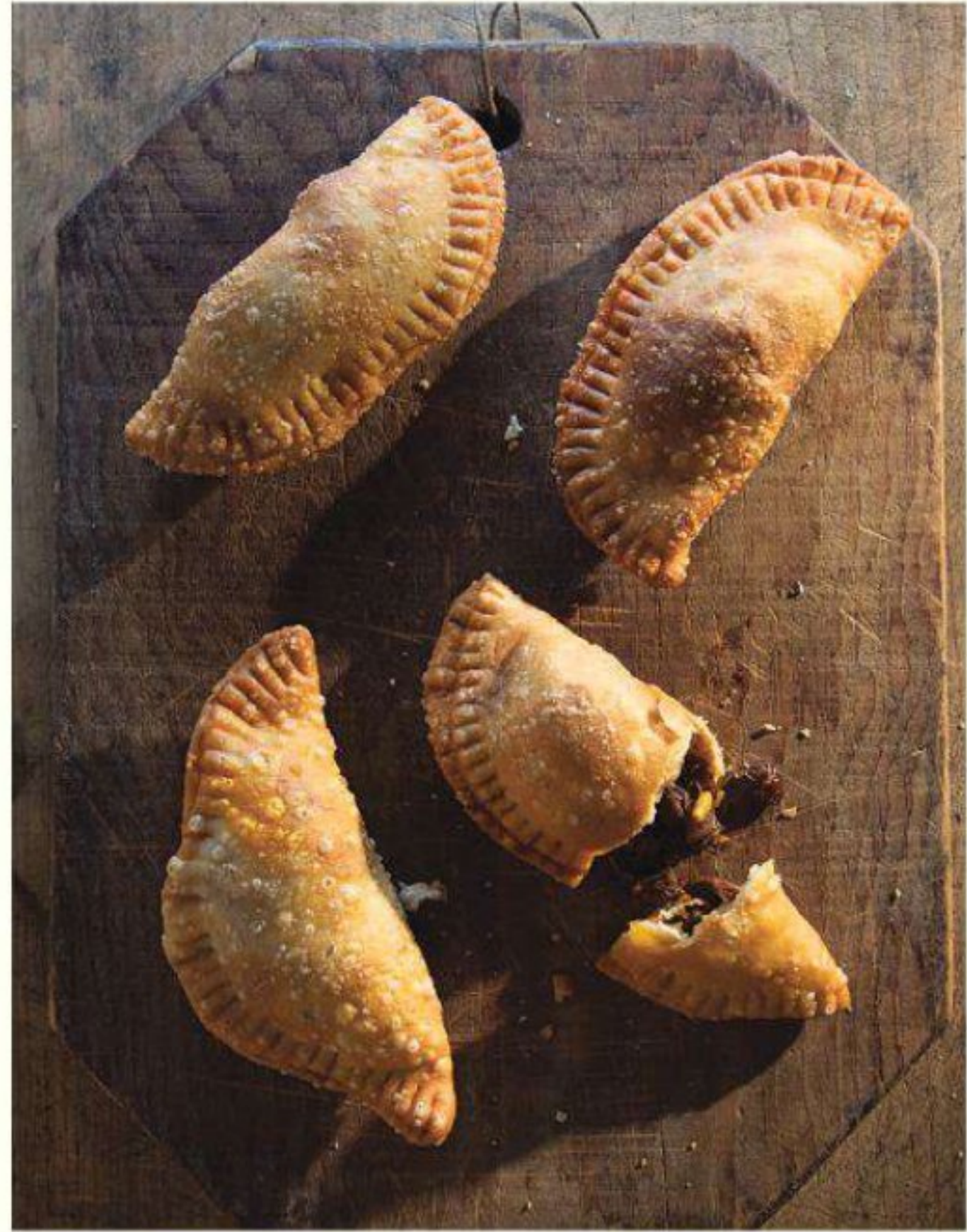
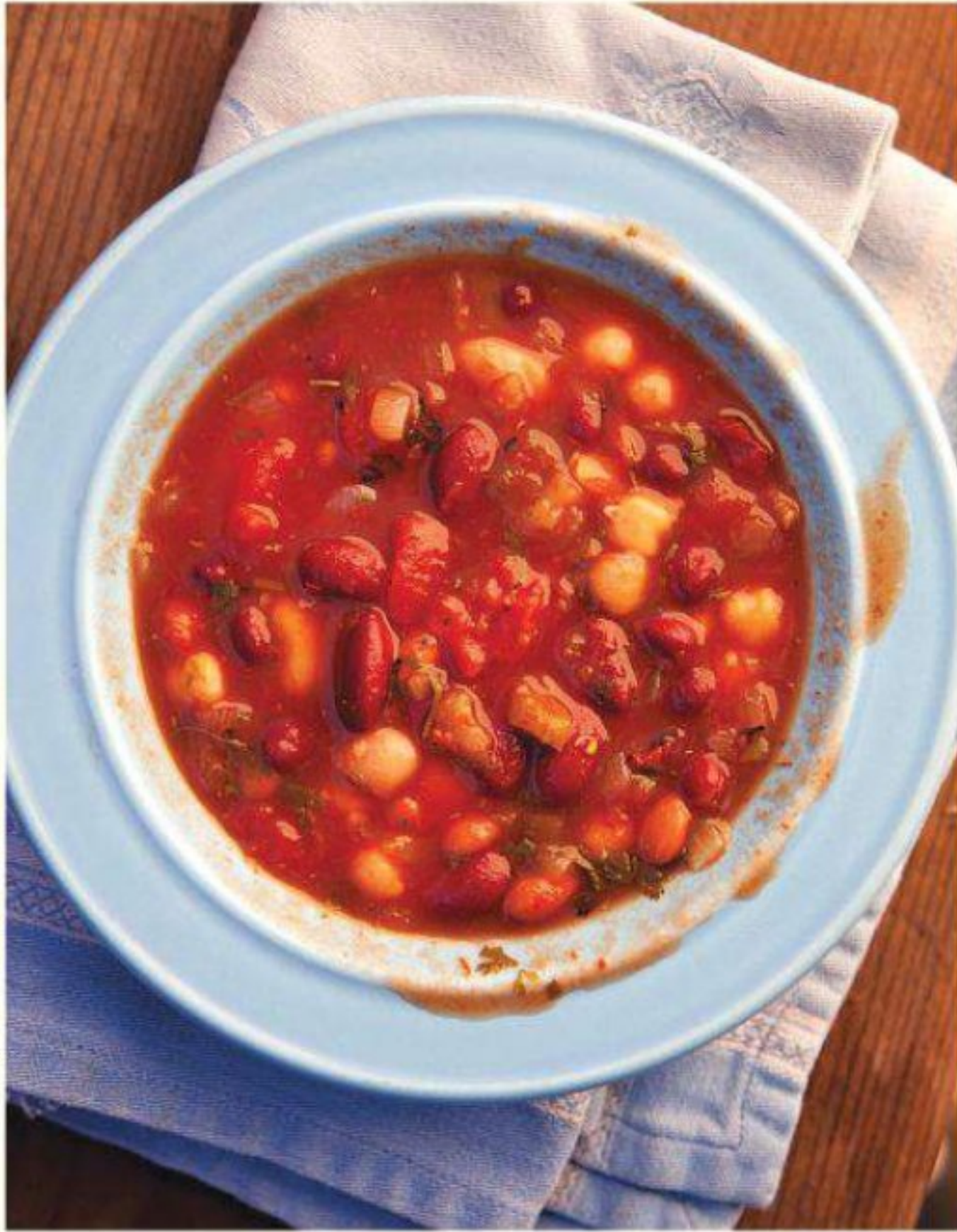
Above: Onion and olive enchiladas (see [page 77](#) for a recipe). Facing page: At Rancho San Julián, neighbor Chris Malloy transports a table for the Poetts' alfresco dinner with the help of his young son, Lucas.



Elizabeth Poett and her dog, Ella, ride in the back of her father's pickup truck in the La Cadena section of Rancho San Julián. Behind her is a ribbon of California's Highway 1.







Clockwise from top left: Stewed beans; beef brisket and picadillo–stuffed empanadas; grilled tri-tip tacos; poblano peppers, charred for tacos. Facing page: Apricot tarts with pistachios. Recipes start on [page 76](#).



Above: Grilled romaine salad with blue cheese and bacon (see [page 76](#) for a recipe). Facing page: Elizabeth Poett and her father, Jim, share a laugh on the porch of her ranch-style house.

(continued from page 68) market tell me that our meat is what steak used to taste like when they were kids," she says.

In this part of California, you can't have tri-tip without beans. A lot of people insist on Santa Maria-style beans—named after the nearby town where tri-tip barbecues are a way of life, and typically made with a local variety of beans called pinto beans, which are slow-cooked with tomatoes, onion, and all kinds of seasonings. Some cooks make a refried version of this; others, like Elizabeth, like to add bacon. But her cousin Julianna has made an ingenious updated version using kidney beans and pintos, as well as chickpeas, stewed to a caramel depth and brightened with bell peppers, fresh salsa, cilantro, and jalapeños. Fantastic. There's nothing particularly traditional about the dish, and in that sense it strikes me as particularly Californian.

The tri-tip is a handsome centerpiece, but what really blows me away is Marianne's empanadas. Made with fresh corn masa, they're flaky and delicate yet packed with strikingly bold flavors. It's not just the luscious shreds of long-roasted brisket, which alone would have been enough; it's the picadillo of sherry-soaked raisins, pine nuts, and olives, which delivers a briny-sweet balance in every bite. A dusting of powdered sugar on the golden pastry puts the empanadas just over the top. This is typical Poett family cooking: dishes made with incredible love and attention, presented in unpretentious packages.

Dessert is an apricot tart, brought over by the Poetts' neighbors, Chris and Carla Malloy, and made with fruit that grows on the ranch. The sun is well below the hills by the time we dig into it. Another of the cousins, Daniel Berman, pours me a little more of the Lompoc pinot noir he's brought from the Santa Barbara winery where he works. It's getting chilly, but Elizabeth and I linger at the table long after dessert, talking about our lives. After living in New York for a few years, she came back to San Julián in 2006 and got married a few years later, moving into one of the old ranch houses on the vast

property. I ask her what a typical day is like.

"Well," she replies, "tomorrow I have to deliver some marrow bones to a chef, feed a new bunch of steers extra hay and alfalfa so they'll start putting on weight, and sort some bulls from a group of heifers so the vet can get in there and see if the girls are pregnant." Elizabeth asks me about life back East. I tell her she's not missing much.

AT SIX THE NEXT MORNING, Elizabeth and I are bumping along a dirt road in her Chevy pickup through a valley dotted with more of those majestic California live oaks.



ELIZABETH COOKS THE BURGERS IN A SEASONED CAST-IRON SKILLET SET OVER THE HOT FIRE SO THAT THEIR JUICES AREN'T LOST TO THE FLAMES

In the near distance, black Angus cows graze with their calves. It's barely light, and a cool fog has rolled in from the Pacific overnight, obscuring the hills around us. We're on our way to the farmers' market, and the bed of the pickup is filled with coolers containing rib eyes, chuck roasts, skirt steaks, briskets, sirloins, ribs, and plenty of tri-tips. At the market, Elizabeth, willowy and blond, cuts a striking figure among the other farmers, who are mostly men. Business at the Rancho San Julián stand is more than brisk.

We're back at Elizabeth's house a few hours later, in time for a late lunch. We make tacos with some of the leftover tri-tip, chopped onion, and a couple of poblano

peppers that she has roasted over an open flame on her stove until they're blackened and blistered.

After lunch I help Elizabeth and her husband, Austin Campbell, who works on a ranch not far away, get the house and yard ready for tonight's dinner, a birthday celebration for Daniel. Jim and Marianne will be coming down from their house, a few miles away, along with other relatives. With some delicate maneuvering, we manage to carry Elizabeth's dining room table out onto the wood porch, which has rosebushes growing all around it. Austin loads the grill barrel with wood.

"Tonight we'll keep it simple and make burgers," says Elizabeth. That kind of statement can be deceptive in the Poett family. The just-ground patties are magnificent chuck from the San Julián herd—as richly marbled as that of any corn-fed animal. Elizabeth cooks them not over the grill grate directly but in an old seasoned cast-iron skillet set over the hot fire so that their fat and juices aren't lost to the flames. And, as I'm reminded at dinner, burgers around here serve double duty as a luscious platform for an extravagant tower of fresh produce, from grilled yellow onions to crunchy lettuce leaves to thick-sliced garnet-red tomatoes.

Just as everyone is showing up, Elizabeth tosses ribbons of summer squash on the grill and then improvises a salad: heads of romaine cut in half and laid on the fire until

they're singed around the edges. Drizzled with olive oil and balsamic vinegar and strewn with crumbled bacon and blue cheese, they make an unfussy but stunning side dish.

Given the freshest meat and produce in the world, I think to myself, no restaurant could put forth a meal as guilelessly beautiful as this. At the end of the night, Elizabeth and I are once again the last ones to retire, sitting close to each other at the end of the long table, which is now mostly bare, except for a few flickering candles. We reminisce, and also talk about the future. I tell her I hate the thought of leaving, and I promise her that, next time, I won't stay away for so long. 🐾

Apricot Tarts with Pistachios

SERVES 8

Lightly sweetened apricots are baked quickly in a simple shortbread crust for these rustic tarts (pictured on [page 72](#)), which are garnished with vibrant green pistachios and fleur de sel. Other stone fruits, like plums and peaches, will work just as well.

- 2 cups flour
- ½ tsp. kosher salt
- ¼ tsp. baking powder
- 1 cup sugar
- 8 tbsp. unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. almond extract
- 6 medium apricots, halved, pitted, and cut into 8 wedges each
- Finely chopped pistachios, to garnish
- Fleur de sel, to taste (optional)

1 Heat oven to 350°. Whisk together flour, ¼ tsp. salt, and baking powder in a bowl; set aside. Combine ½ cup sugar, butter, and 1 tsp. vanilla in a bowl, and beat on medium-high speed of a hand mixer until pale and fluffy, about 4 minutes. Add dry ingredients and 3 tbsp. ice-cold water, and beat until just combined; transfer dough to a work surface, and form into a ball. Halve dough, and press each half into the bottom and sides of an 8" tart pan with removable bottom; refrigerate for 30 minutes. Prick bottom of dough with a fork; cover bottom with a sheet of parchment paper; fill with dried beans. Bake until crust is set, about 20 minutes. Remove paper and beans; bake until crust is light brown, about 15 minutes. Let cool.

2 Combine remaining salt, sugar, and vanilla along with almond extract and apricots in a bowl, and toss until evenly combined. Decoratively arrange apricot wedges in each tart shell, and pour any juices left in bowl over tarts; bake until crust is golden brown and apricots are slightly caramelized, about 1 hour. Let cool completely, and then sprinkle with pistachios and fleur de sel, if you like.

Beef Brisket and Picadillo-Stuffed Empanadas

MAKES ABOUT 2 DOZEN

Tender, braised beef brisket is combined with raisins, sherry, pine

nuts, and spicy chile powder in the fragrant filling for these sugar-dusted, savory-sweet empanadas (pictured on [page 73](#)).

- 4 cups flour
- 6 tbsp. unsalted butter, cubed
- 1½ tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 lb. beef brisket
- 5 cloves garlic, smashed
- 2 medium carrots, halved crosswise
- 2 large white onions, 1 quartered and 1 minced
- 3 tbsp. chile powder
- 1½ tbsp. finely chopped oregano leaves
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 cup raisins
- ½ cup sliced pitted canned black olives
- ½ cup dry sherry
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Canola oil, for frying

1 Make the dough: Combine flour, butter, and salt in a large bowl, and using your fingers, rub butter into flour until pea-size crumbles form. Add 1½ cups warm water and stir until dough forms. Knead in the bowl until smooth, about 4 minutes. Wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour.

2 Meanwhile, heat ¼ cup olive oil in a 6-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Season beef with salt and pepper, and add to pan; cook, turning once, until browned on both sides, about 8 minutes. Add garlic, carrots, quartered onion, and 6 cups water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook until beef is very tender, about 2½ hours.

3 Remove from heat, and let beef sit in saucepan until cool enough to handle, about 30 minutes. Transfer beef to a cutting board, and reserve 1 cup cooking liquid; discard remaining liquid and vegetables or reserve for another use. Shred meat into thin strands, and then finely chop; set aside.

4 Wipe the saucepan dry, then heat remaining olive oil over medium-high heat; add minced onion, and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 12 minutes. Add chile powder, oregano, and cumin, and cook for 1 minute. Add reserved beef and cooking liquid along with

raisins, olives, sherry, sugar, and pine nuts; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium, and cook, stirring occasionally, until raisins are plump and meat has absorbed most of the liquid, about 20 minutes; set aside to cool.

5 Divide dough into 24 balls, and place on a work surface; using a small rolling pin or the heel of your hand, flatten each ball into a 5" disk, brush edges with water, and place 2 tbsp. filling in the center. Fold disks in half to form half-moons, and seal edges together using the tines of a fork. Refrigerate empanadas for at least 1 hour, or up to overnight.

6 Pour oil to a depth of 2" in a 6-qt. saucepan, and heat over medium-high heat until a deep-fry thermometer reads 350°. Working in batches, fry empanadas until browned and crisp, about 6 minutes. Transfer to paper towels to drain before serving.

Grilled Romaine Salad with Blue Cheese and Bacon

SERVES 4-6

Fresh heads of romaine lettuce are split down the middle, grilled until charred and smoky, and then topped with blue cheese and bacon for this satisfying salad (pictured on [page 74](#)).

- 6 strips bacon
- 2 tbsp. olive oil
- 2 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbsp. Worcestershire sauce
- 5 heads romaine lettuce, halved lengthwise, rinsed and dried
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 4 oz. blue cheese, crumbled

1 Heat bacon in a 12" skillet over medium heat, and cook, turning once, until crisp and fat is rendered, about 10 minutes. Transfer bacon to a plate, reserving 2 tbsp. drippings, and let cool; crumble and set aside. Transfer reserved drippings to a bowl, and add oil, vinegar, and Worcestershire; whisk until smooth, and set dressing aside.

2 Build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill, or heat a gas grill to medium-high. (Alternatively, heat a cast-iron grill pan over medium-high heat.) Working in batches, if necessary, place romaine halves cut-side down on grill, and cook, turning once, until charred and

slightly wilted, about 4 minutes.

3 Transfer lettuce cut-side up to a serving platter, and season with salt and pepper; drizzle with dressing, and sprinkle with reserved bacon and blue cheese.

Grilled Tri-Tip Tacos

SERVES 4-6

The beef cut of choice for California barbecue and grilling, tri-tip steak (also called Newport, Santa Maria, or triangle steak) comes from the lean bottom sirloin. Here it's sliced and seasoned with rosemary, chiles, garlic, and cumin in a tender filling for tacos (pictured on [page 73](#)).

- 2 lb. whole tri-tip steak
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- ½ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup rosemary leaves
- 6 cloves garlic, mashed into a paste
- 2 large poblano chiles
- 1 large yellow onion, roughly chopped
- 1 tsp. dark chile powder
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- Warm corn tortillas, for serving
- Tomato salsa, for serving (optional)

1 Season steak with salt and pepper, and rub with 3 tbsp. olive oil, rosemary, and garlic; wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and refrigerate at least 6 hours or up to overnight.

2 Heat broiler to high. Place chiles on a foil-lined baking sheet, and broil, turning as needed, until blackened all over, about 20 minutes. Transfer to a bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let sit until cooled, about 30 minutes. Remove stems, skins, and seeds; roughly chop, and set aside.

3 Build a medium-hot fire in a charcoal grill, or heat a gas grill to medium. (Alternatively, heat a cast-iron grill pan over medium-high heat.) Remove steak from marinade, and transfer to grill; cook fat-side down, flipping once, until charred and cooked to desired doneness, about 50 minutes for medium. Transfer steak to a cutting board, and let rest for 15 minutes.

4 Meanwhile, heat remaining oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat; add onion, and cook, stirring, until soft, about 10 minutes. Stir in reserved chiles along with chile

powder, cumin, and salt and pepper; remove from the heat.

5 Thinly slice meat against the grain, and then roughly chop; combine with onion and chile mixture in a serving bowl, and serve with tortillas and salsa, if you like.

Onion and Olive Enchiladas

SERVES 8

Anaheim and pasilla chiles combine in a puréed sauce for these Cal-Mex-style enchiladas (pictured on [page 69](#)), filled with cotija cheese and black olives.

- 10 dried Anaheim or New Mexican chiles, stemmed
- 6 dried pasilla chiles, stemmed
- 4 cloves garlic
- ½ cup olive oil
- 5 tbsp. flour
- 2 tbsp. cider vinegar
- 2 tsp. dried oregano
- 2 large yellow onions, thinly sliced
- 10 6" flour tortillas
- 12 oz. cotija cheese
- 1 6-oz. can large pitted black olives, drained and roughly chopped

1 Heat oven to 350°. Place chiles in a large bowl, and cover with boiling water; let sit until chiles are soft, about 20 minutes. Drain, reserving 2½ cups soaking liquid, and then remove stems and seeds from chiles; transfer chiles to a blender along with reserved soaking liquid and garlic; purée until smooth, and set aside.

2 Heat 5 tbsp. oil in a 4-qt. saucepan over medium heat; add flour, and cook, whisking constantly, until mixture is a light caramel color, about 3 minutes. Add chile purée, vinegar, and oregano, and season with salt. Bring to a boil, and cook, stirring, until thickened, about 5 minutes; set chile sauce aside. Heat remaining oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat. Add onions, and cook, stirring, until golden brown, about 25 minutes.

3 To assemble, spread ¼ cup chile sauce in the bottom of a 9" x 13" baking dish. Dip one tortilla at a time into sauce, and then place on a plate; sprinkle with ⅓ cup cooked onions, ¼ cup cotija, and 1 tbsp. olives. Roll up tightly, and place in the baking dish, seam-side down;

repeat with remaining tortillas, and more sauce, cheese, and olives.

4 Pour remaining sauce over enchiladas, and sprinkle with remaining cheese and olives; bake until heated through and cheese is just melted, about 40 minutes.

Stewed Beans

SERVES 10-12

Lompoc, California, home cook Juliana Fabio includes kidney beans, pinto beans, and chickpeas in this tomato-based side dish (pictured on [page 73](#)), a riff on the Santa Maria-style beans traditionally served alongside tri-tip steak on California's Central Coast.

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 8 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 1 yellow onion, chopped
- 1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 1 large jalapeño, stemmed, seeded, and finely chopped
- 3 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 tbsp. dried thyme
- 1 tbsp. dried oregano
- 1 tbsp. chile powder
- 1½ tsp. paprika
- 1 cup dried kidney beans,

soaked overnight and drained

- 1 cup dried pinto beans, soaked overnight and drained
- 1 cup dried chickpeas, soaked overnight and drained
- 1 15-oz. can whole, peeled tomatoes in juice, crushed by hand
- 1 bunch cilantro, stemmed and roughly chopped
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 Heat oil in an 8-qt. saucepan over medium-high heat. Add garlic, onion, pepper, and jalapeño, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, 12-15 minutes. Add paste, thyme, oregano, chile powder, and paprika, and cook, stirring, until lightly caramelized, about 3 minutes. Add all beans and 7 cups water, and bring to a boil; reduce heat to medium-low, and cook, covered partially, until beans are very tender, about 1 hour.

2 Uncover, stir in tomatoes, and cook, stirring, until tomatoes break down, about 30 minutes. Stir in cilantro, and season with salt and pepper before serving.

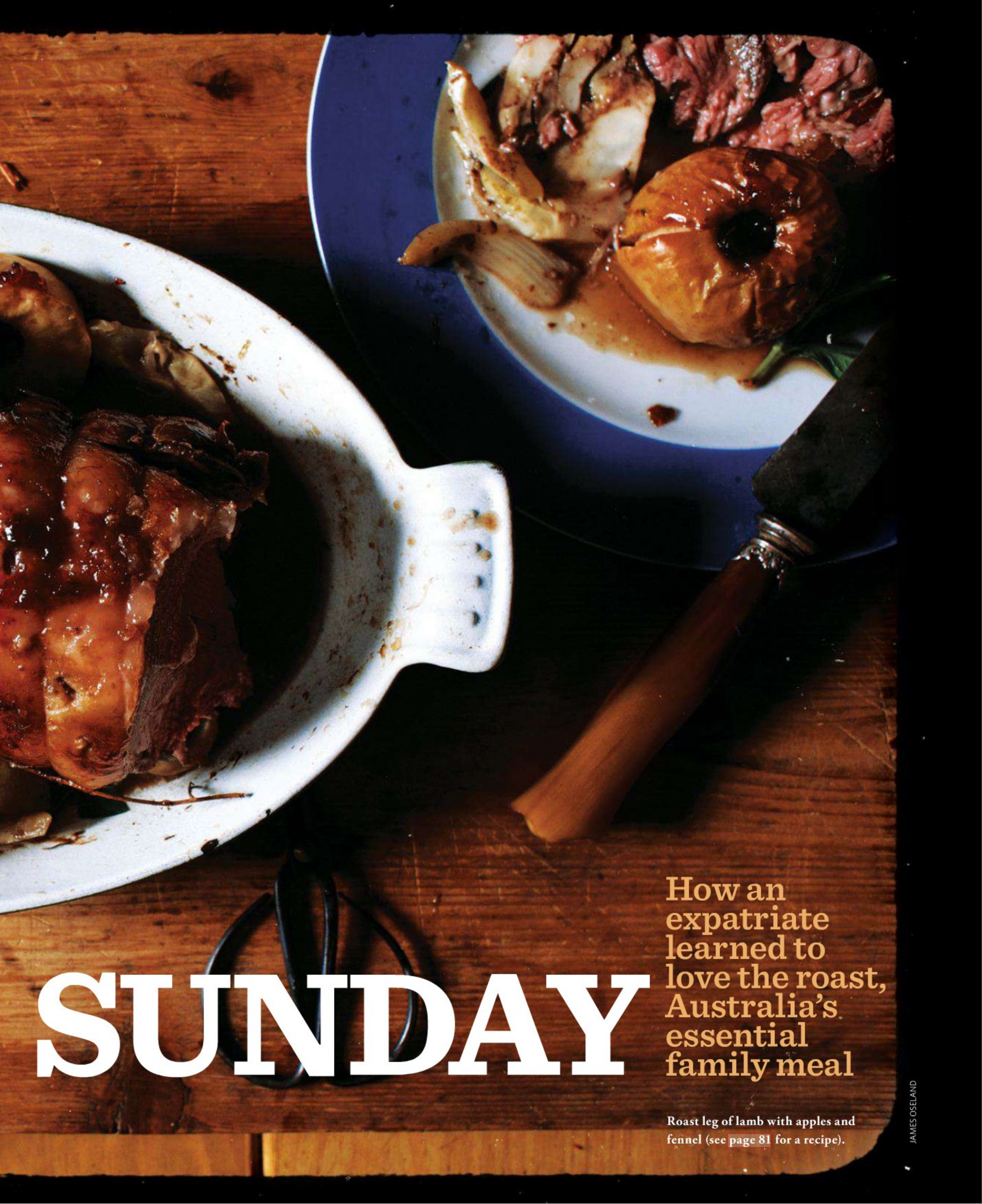
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A high-angle, close-up photograph of a roasted chicken, likely a Cornish game hen, served in a white oval ceramic dish. The chicken is golden-brown and glistening with a dark, sticky sauce. It is surrounded by several halved potatoes, also coated in the same sauce. Fresh green herbs, possibly basil or mint, are scattered around the chicken. The dish is placed on a rustic wooden cutting board. A silver fork and a wooden-handled knife are positioned near the dish. In the upper left corner, a small blue and white patterned bowl contains a dark, thick sauce. The lighting is warm and dramatic, highlighting the textures of the food and the wood.

ANY GIVEN



SUNDAY

How an
expatriate
learned to
love the roast,
Australia's
essential
family meal

Roast leg of lamb with apples and
fennel (see [page 81](#) for a recipe).

by **FOUAD KASSAB**

I WAS 20 YEARS OLD WHEN I LEFT Lebanon for Australia, moving to Sydney to go to college. It was my first time away from home, and, as it turned out, I wasn't quite ready for the independence: Though I'd grown up with a superb cook for a mother, I didn't know how to fry an egg. During my first months in Sydney, I subsisted on microwavable supermarket meat pies and burgers and fries from the greasy spoon around the corner. I felt disconnected from this food, such a far cry from what I grew up with. I missed the *labne*, a tangy soft cheese my mom made from yogurt, which she'd serve with olives from trees my great-grandfather planted, and season with wild mountain thyme that we'd foraged ourselves. I missed her *kibbeh nayyeh*, minced lamb pounded with fresh marjoram and mint, mixed with bulgur and drowned with olive oil. Most of all, I missed how those meals in Lebanon made me feel, how they required my participation, and how they connected me to my family. Australia and its food felt shallow by contrast. My meals in Sydney seemed to have no provenance, said nothing I could decipher about the land they came from, and what's more, they came ready, with no need for effort on my part. These meals made me feel like more of an outsider than I already was.

After a few months, I started to make friends with other students who lived in my neighborhood. I connected with Elaine, a cute Australian girl who invited me to her home to meet her parents one weekend. "We're having Sunday roast," Elaine said, beaming. Thinking of those burgers, chips, and meat pies, I held no great hope for the visit.

We arrived at Elaine's parents' home, a small farmhouse outside of Sydney, just as the meal was almost ready. We hurried through the introductions, and Elaine slipped away to help her mother in the kitchen. I sat with her father at the dining table for what felt like a year of strained silence. Then, the rich smells of caramelizing vegetables and roasting meat took over the dining room. The awkwardness dissipated as Elaine and her mother brought in platters piled high with baked pumpkin and sweet potatoes, boiled Brussels sprouts and green beans, and jugs of gravy and mint sauce. And then came the center-

piece, the roast leg of lamb. I was dumbstruck as it was set before me. I had never before seen lamb served in such primal on-the-bone grandeur. Back home, lamb was one ingredient of many: flaked into pilafs large enough to feed a family of ten (and maybe several neighbors, too); stewed with okra and tomatoes; minced and fried with onions and sprinkled atop hummus. In contrast, served as it was to just the four of us, the Sunday roast struck me as a particularly opulent tradition. Elaine's father carved the leg, and we crowded our plates with slices of lamb and all the trimmings. Each element was delicious on its own, but, for me, the combination of it all was a revelation, and to this day, I think of that lunch as the first real meal I had in Australia.

After that, I started accepting invitations to Sunday roasts at every opportunity. As I found my place here, making friends with fellow students and, later, co-workers, there were a lot of opportunities. The weekly Sunday roast is a British tradition, brought by colonists to Australia in the late 18th century; it was common practice to put a roast to cook before leaving for church, come back home to a hearty meal, and extend the leftovers through the week that followed. But here in Australia, it's become an institution in its own right. It's the most important family meal, the week's main opportunity for a get-together. As I visited family after family, the basic scheme became apparent: A central piece of meat is served with roasted starchy vegetables, boiled green vegetables, gravy, and a sweet condiment, like mint jelly, cranberry relish, or applesauce. Within these parameters, what ended up on the table each time varied tremendously. Some of my hosts, like Elaine's family, hewed closely to the traditional "meat and two veg" British formula. Others brought their own heritage to bear on the meal, with an Italian *porchetta* in the place of honor at one home, Portuguese-style chicken at another, and, at the table of a French acquaintance, lamb cooked with apples, served with boiled shrimp and basil-infused mayonnaise, a sort of Gallic surf and turf. The variations, I realized, were endless.

About five years ago, after countless meals at the homes of friends, I finally decided to tackle the roast myself. My first try (not the wisest choice, in retrospect), skinless chicken breast, was a disaster: It turned out terribly dry and flavorless. The next, a pork loin roast, had a stubborn sheath of skin that refused to crackle no matter what. My good friend Stephanie assured me that quality was only optional: "A proper Sunday roast is soggy vegetables, packaged gravy, and mint sauce out

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**I HAD NEVER SEEN LAMB SERVED IN SUCH PR
SUNDAY ROAST SEEMED TO ME A PARTICULAR**

of a bottle. And the meat has to be overcooked. None of that ‘just pink’ gourmet stuff.” Hers, I realized, was a nostalgic though generally accurate view of how most homes would have had their roast in the not too distant past, before epicureanism took Australia by storm. Even for an accomplished cook, the Sunday roast is a feast of so many moving parts that it takes an obsessive to get it all just right. Without careful planning, roasting a leg of lamb in the same oven with potatoes might mean that one of the two is going to overcook (usually the lamb); and while you’re making the gravy, it’s easy to forget all about the broccoli and beans as they boil away to mush.

Even so, determined to get it right, I kept at it, and eventually found my footing in the kitchen and made the meal my own. I came to cherish Australia’s richly marbled, flavorful saltbush-fed lamb, which has a generous layer of external fat that keeps the meat tender while it cooks. I learned a few tricks to get the timing right, taking the meat out to rest prior to cooking the sweet potatoes, and putting it back in the oven to warm it up again just before dinnertime. And most important, I realized that, although a roast for one could be one of life’s great luxuries, the meal is best if the cooking and eating are done with company. Sharing the work in the kitchen, and the meal after, was key to that feeling of communion I remembered from my childhood meals in Lebanon.

Elaine and I are married now, and we do a roast every Sunday, I taking inspiration from memories of my mother’s cooking, and Elaine doing the same from hers. With our two-year-old daughter Sara hungry and underfoot, we divide the work between us. If we’re pressed for time, we’ll do a quick chicken roast, rubbing the thighs and drumsticks with garlic, salt, and olive oil, and serve it with *toum*, an emulsion of oil, garlic, and lemon juice that is the traditional sauce for Lebanese chicken shawarma. If we’re feeling more ambitious, we’ll do ten-hour lamb shoulder seasoned with sumac berries, while Elaine makes her mom’s rosemary gravy to match. We stir-fry green beans in pan drippings with garlic until they begin to caramelize, and then toss roasted potatoes with fresh coriander and lemon and serve them with tahini *tarator*, a nutty sauce of garlic, lemon, and sesame paste. And when we sit down to eat every Sunday after hours of cooking and anticipation, we never care if the lamb is a little overcooked. In the end, it’s not the meat that matters. 🍴

★ Roast Leg of Lamb with Apples and Fennel

SERVES 8–10

Babette Hayes, an acquaintance of the author’s, shared her recipe for this succulent roast (pictured on page 78), which is cooked alongside apples and fennel, perfumed with garlic and rosemary, and has a sweet-tart crust from a glaze of red currant jelly and pomegranate molasses. Ask your butcher to partially expose the shank, which you can use as a sort of handle for easier carving.

- 1 5-lb. bone-in leg of lamb, shank bone exposed
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 10 cloves garlic, peeled and halved crosswise
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup rosemary leaves
- 6 small, firm, tart apples, such as Fuji, Gala, or Granny Smith, left whole and cored with an apple corer
- 1 small yellow onion, quartered
- 1 medium bulb fennel, trimmed and cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ " wedges
- 1 cup red currant jelly, plus more for serving
- 1 cup apple juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pomegranate molasses (see page 92)
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- Mint leaves, to garnish (optional)

1 Heat oven to 450°. Tie lamb with kitchen twine in 1" intervals so it forms an even shape; season liberally with salt and pepper. Using a paring knife, pierce the meat in about 6 places, and stuff holes with the garlic and half the rosemary leaves. Halve 2 apples crosswise, and place in the bottom of a 9" x 13" baking dish; sprinkle with remaining rosemary, and add onion and fennel. Season with salt and pepper, and place lamb on top of vegetables.

2 Arrange remaining apples, right side up, on one side of the lamb. Fill each apple with about 2 tbsp. jelly; rub remaining jelly over lamb. Whisk together apple juice, pomegranate molasses, and lemon zest and juice in a medium bowl; drizzle over lamb and apples. Wrap a small piece of foil around the tip of the lamb bone to prevent it from burning, and roast until lamb is beginning to brown, about 30 minutes. Reduce heat to 350°, and continue roasting until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the

thickest part of the lamb reads 130°, about 45 minutes for medium-rare.

3 Remove lamb from the oven and let rest for 20 minutes. Remove twine, and thinly slice lamb crosswise; transfer to a serving platter. Arrange apples, onion, and fennel alongside lamb, and garnish with mint leaves, if you like. Serve with more jelly on the side.

Lemon-and-Herb-Roasted Vegetables

SERVES 8

Chopped whole lemon and spicy fresh ginger lend brightness to these hearty roasted vegetables, which complement the rich roast leg of lamb. In place of the potatoes and acorn squash in the recipe, parsnips and pumpkin can also be used.

- 10 cloves garlic, 7 left whole, 3 mashed into a paste
- 2 medium waxy potatoes, peeled and cut into 1" chunks
- 2 medium carrots, cut crosswise into 1" chunks
- 2 small fennel bulbs, trimmed and cut into 1" wedges
- 1 small acorn squash, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1" chunks
- 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1" chunks
- 1 small red onion, cut into 1" wedges
- 1 lemon, cut into 1" chunks
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp. thyme leaves
- 2 tbsp. roughly chopped rosemary leaves
- 1 2"-piece ginger, peeled and minced
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Heat oven to 425°. Combine whole garlic cloves, potatoes, carrots, fennel, squash, sweet potatoes, onion, and lemon in a large bowl. Whisk together garlic paste, oil, thyme, rosemary, and ginger in a small bowl; pour over vegetables, season liberally with salt and pepper, and toss until evenly coated. Divide vegetables between 2 rimmed baking sheets, and bake, rotating baking sheets from the front of the oven to the back of the oven and from the top rack to the bottom rack, making sure to stir vegetables halfway through cooking, until golden brown and tender, about 1 hour and 20 minutes.

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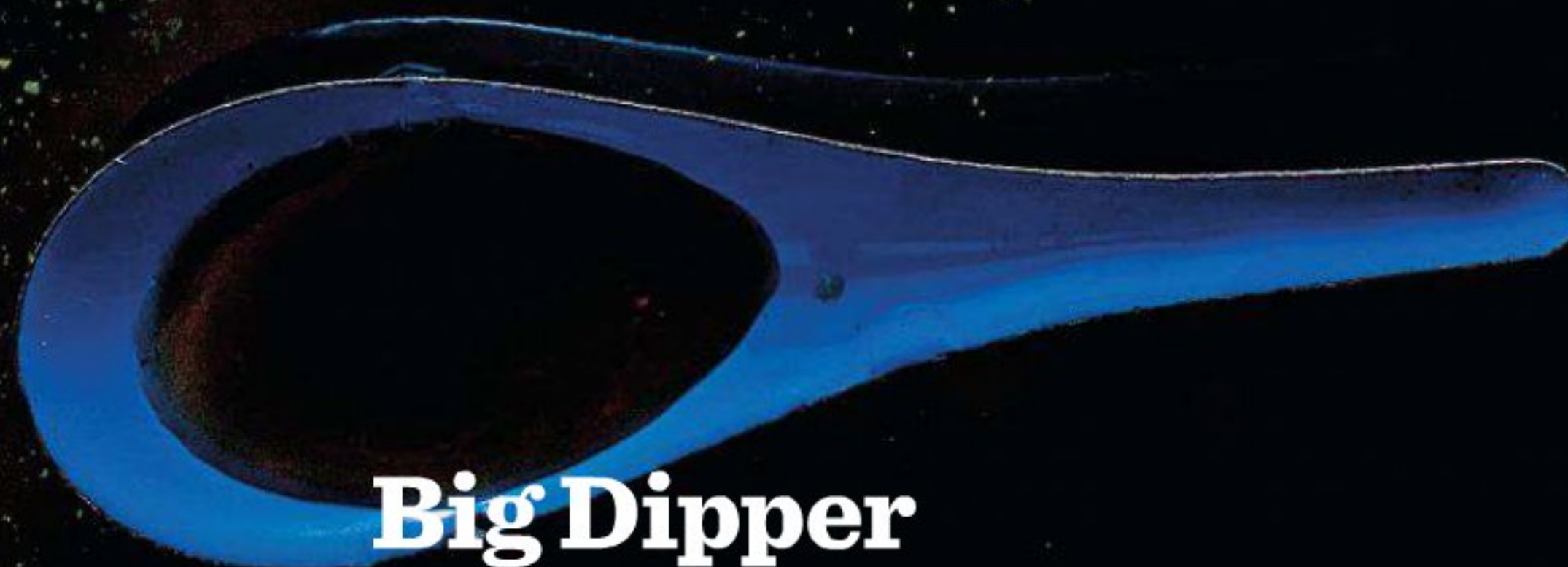
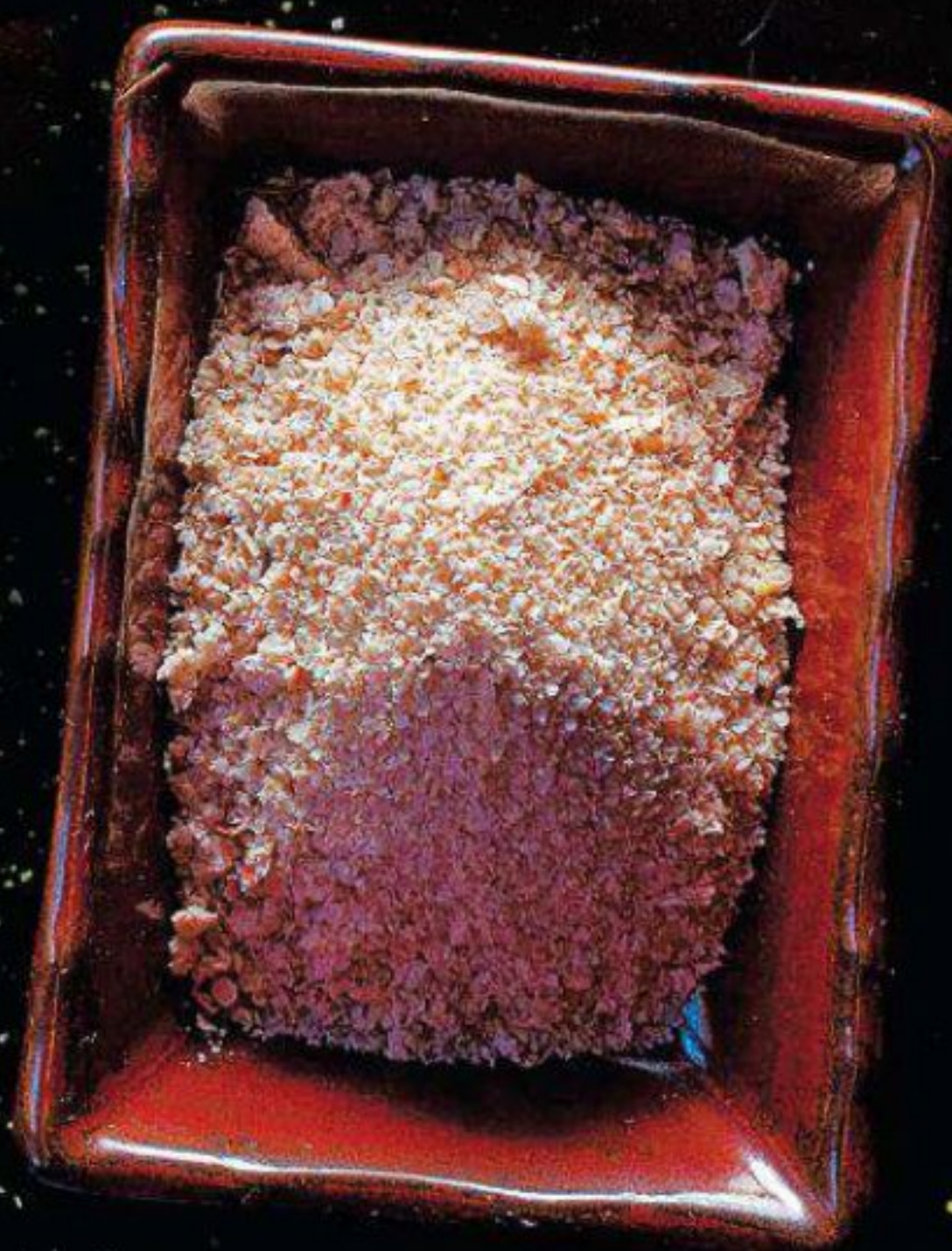
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KITCHEN

Discoveries and Techniques From Our Favorite Room in the House » Edited by Todd Coleman



Big Dipper

Flavored salts and sauces add depth and flavor to tempura

FOR CENTURIES, CRISP-FRIED TEMPURA has been a mainstay of Japanese tables. But according to sources like Shizuo Tsuji's *Japanese Cooking: A Simple Art* (Kondasha America, Inc., 1980), this iconic food was actually introduced in the 16th-century by Portuguese and Spanish missionaries, who were accustomed to batter-frying their fish. Other fried Japanese foods, like the breaded pork cutlet *tonkatsu*, also originated in this period.

Adapting the European technique to their own tastes, Japanese cooks lightened the batter and created a dipping sauce

intended specifically for the dish: a *dashi*, or stock made from dried fish and seaweed, which was enhanced with grated daikon. The umami-rich sauce, versions of which are served in *tempura-ya*, the tempura restaurants found all over Japan, boosts the delicate flavor of the deep-fried specialty.

When we invited the New York-based chef Tadashi Ono into the *SAVEUR* test kitchen to show us how he prepares his ethereal shrimp and vegetable tempura (see "Light as a Feather," page 38), we asked him for his recipe of this traditional condiment. Ono's pungent dip consisted of *dashi*, soy sauce, and sweet rice cooking

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wine and was punctuated with refreshing grated daikon, as well as fresh ginger, whose spiciness contrasted with the nutty flavors of the tempura batter.

Almost as common as the sauce are seasoned dipping salts; these add mouth-watering salinity to a food that is otherwise cooked without any seasoning. Ono showed us how to make two such salts. The first combined sea salt with matcha green tea powder. Made from finely ground tea leaves, matcha lends the dipping salt a brilliant vegetal edge.

The final recipe was the most ingenious; for this condiment, Ono made use of the reserved shells he had peeled from the shrimp, roasting them until pink and crisp, and then pulverizing them in a spice grinder before mixing them with sea salt. The shells brought a toasty, briny depth to the seasoning that contrasted with the natural sweetness of the crustacean, adding to the complexity of an inherently simple food. —Kellie Evans

Tentsuyu

(Tempura Dipping Sauce)

MAKES ABOUT 2¼ CUPS

For this tempura dipping sauce, *dashi* is laced with soy sauce and mirin, and punctuated with fresh-grated daikon and ginger.

- ½ (2" x 15") piece kombu (see [page 92](#))
- 2 tbsp. dried bonito flakes (see [page 92](#))
- ½ cup soy sauce
- ½ cup mirin
- ¾ cup peeled and finely grated daikon

- 1 tbsp. peeled and finely grated ginger

Bring kombu and 1½ cups water to a boil in a 2-qt. saucepan. Stir in bonito flakes, and remove from heat; let steep for 5 minutes. Pour through a fine strainer into a bowl, return to saucepan, and add soy sauce, mirin, daikon, and ginger; bring to a boil. Remove from heat and let cool to room temperature before serving.

Matcha-Jio

(Matcha Green Tea Salt)

MAKES ABOUT ¼ CUP

Finely ground matcha green tea powder gives a vegetal boost to sea salt for this tempura seasoning.

- ¼ cup fine sea salt
- 1 tsp. matcha green tea powder (see [page 92](#))

Mix salt and matcha green tea powder together in a bowl.

Ebi Shio

(Shrimp Salt)

MAKES ABOUT ¼ CUP

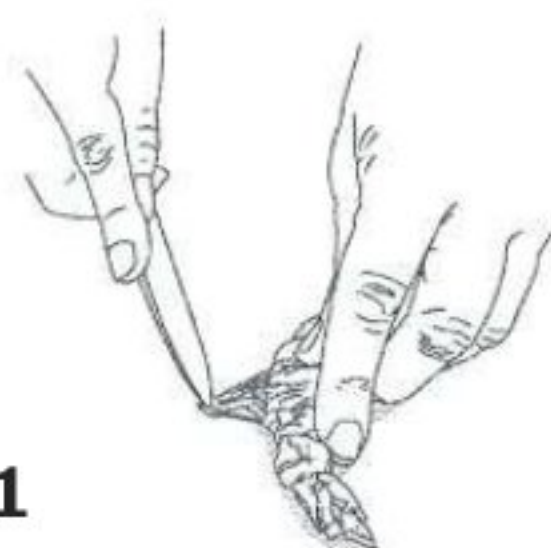
In this thrifty dipping salt, the shells peeled from shrimp are roasted, ground, and mixed with sea salt for a nutty, briny flavor.

- 2 cups shrimp shells, rinsed
- 2 tbsp. fine sea salt

Heat an oven to 400°. Spread shells on a rimmed baking sheet, and cook until bright pink and completely dry, about 15 minutes; let cool. Transfer to a spice grinder, in batches if necessary, and pulse into a fine powder; mix with salt.

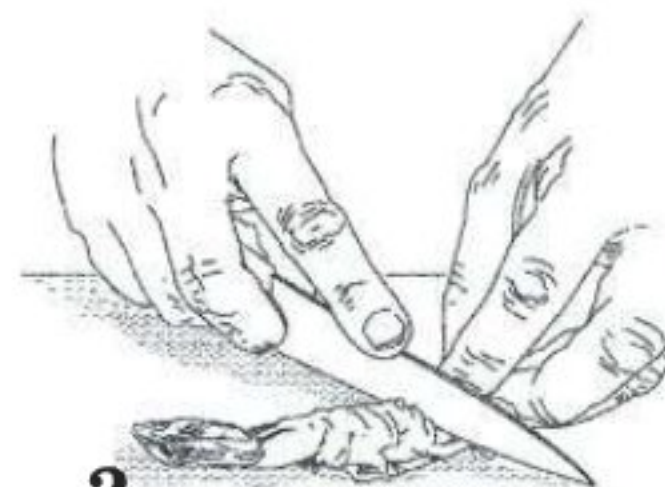
SMALL FRY

Like other low-fat proteins, shrimp shrink when they're cooked. And when they shrink, shrimp curl up. To keep them flat for use in tempura (see "Light as a Feather," [page 38](#)), chefs make several shallow "release" cuts in the shrimp before frying. Here's how it works. —Kellie Evans



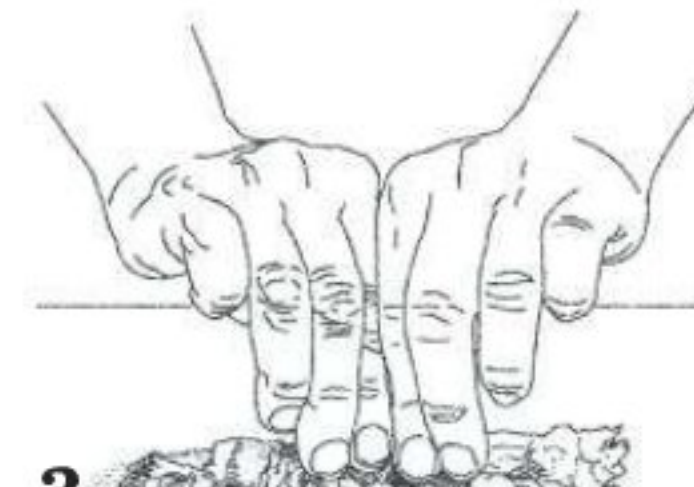
1

Start by peeling and deveining the shrimp with a paring knife. Run the tip of the knife between the flesh and the shell along its curved back until you reach the flared tail. Then, using your fingers, peel the shell, including the legs, away from the flesh in one piece; gently pull out the vein.



2

Flip the shrimp over, belly side up, and holding onto the crustacean's tail, make 4 or 5 very shallow perpendicular cuts along the length of the belly, being careful to not slice all the way through the shrimp.



3

Turn the shrimp over, back side up, and using your fingertips, gently pinch while pressing down on the flesh, moving from tip to tail to straighten and lengthen it. Your shrimp is now ready for battering and frying, a process through which it will remain straight.

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A Visual Feast

As we were editing our latest book, *The Way We Cook* (Weldon Owen, 2012), we were struck by our photographers' engaging images of people cooking in the kitchen and sitting around the table with family and friends. The pictures that appear on the book's pages (some of which are shown at right) capture the spirit of the moment and the meal itself. Indeed, photographs of food—especially dishes made throughout generations—tell us the story of the people who cook and eat them. The images of these dishes are not simply mouthwatering; they serve an emotional purpose, bringing to life a memory in much the same way a spoonful of your mother's cranberry sauce, an old recipe in a family scrapbook, or the smell of onions frying in the kitchen might. Photographs help us hold on to resonant moments and the flavors that shape them. With that in mind, we thought it appropriate to the holidays to share some of our techniques for photographing food in a memorable way. Our hope is that you can use them during your own celebrations to capture cherished culinary traditions.

—Todd Coleman

1. The most flattering light for food is soft backlight, typically light pouring out of a window from behind and slightly above the subject. In the photo of pork with apples and cider cream sauce, backlight creates a dramatic effect, making the edges of the dish glow and the sauce glimmer, and bathing the food in a play of light and shadow.

2. Pick colors in the surface or the plate that echo similar tones in the food to create a bridge between the food and the tableware. This technique instills a sense of balance and harmony within the frame. The photo of the barbecued chicken wings (left) is tied together by black; the wild greens with fried eggs (right) by white.

3. Create frames within the crop of your photos to add depth and guide the eye to your point of focus. The Brazilian fish with shrimp sauce (left) is framed by a piece of banana leaf and a plate. The enchiladas (right) are framed by the plate and footstool.

4. Adding a human element to a photo of a dish helps to establish context and create a sense of movement. In the braised "lion's head" meatballs with napa cabbage, the hand reaching for the food with chopsticks immediately suggests the origin of the dish, while conveying a sense of delicious immediacy.





WHITE CHRISTMAS

WHILE WORKING ON this month's story about white chocolate ("Beyond the Pale," [page 41](#)), we called in more than 100 pounds of the buttery confection to make bread puddings, panna cottas, cookies, and mousse. Given its silky texture and the way its pale hue lends itself to decoration, we were excited to work with it—until we discovered that it's almost impossible to pipe through a pastry bag. That can be a problem if you're trying to cement a gingerbread house, or top that house off with a "snow"-covered roof. Unlike

regular chocolate, which holds its shape after heating, white chocolate, with its high percentage of slippery cocoa butter, turns runny.

Hoping to find a way to pipe it, we paid a visit to Jacques Torres' chocolate factory in Manhattan. The key to decorating with white chocolate, Torres told us, is to sprinkle in water before pouring it from pan to pastry bag. So long as you're working with real white chocolate, with at least 20 percent cocoa butter, the water reacts with the fat molecules to "seize" the chocolate just enough so it remains

pliable, while holding its shape once applied.

To illustrate his point, Torres drew several circles of decreasing size on parchment paper, then piped his water-infused chocolate through a star-shaped tip around the circumference of each. As promised, the chocolate came out thick and textured, and stayed that way. Torres created a series of frilly, white rings that became the layers of "branches" for a sturdy white chocolate Christmas tree. So when it comes to working with white chocolate—just add water. —*Maria Pottage*

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White Chocolate Christmas Tree

MAKES 1 TREE

2½ lbs. white chocolate (at least 20 percent cocoa butter), chopped
10-20 drops green food coloring
10-20 drops red food coloring

1 Using a pencil and 4½", 3½", 3", 2¼", and 1¾" round cookie cutters, trace two circles of each size on three parchment paper-lined baking sheets, leaving at least 2" of room around each circle; set aside. On another parchment paper-lined baking sheet, place both the 4½" and 2¼" rings; set aside.

2 Place 2 lb. chocolate in a bowl set over a saucepan of barely simmering water, and stir constantly until melted, 6–8 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in 1½–2 tsp. water; set aside for 20–25 minutes to thicken. Fill the 4½" and 2¼" cookie cutters with ¼ cup chocolate each; tap baking sheet to settle. Chill until set. Transfer remaining chocolate to a piping bag fitted with a ⅜" star tip, and using the pencil markings as your guide, pipe 1"-long "leaves" radiating from the circumference of each circle. Pipe an "x" inside each of the four largest circles to provide them with greater stability. Pipe two free-form leaves on one of the baking sheets; refrigerate baking sheets until the chocolate sets, 25–30 minutes.

3 Melt remaining chocolate in a bowl set over a saucepan of barely simmering water. Let cool slightly, and divide between two small bowls. Stir ½ tsp. water into one bowl; transfer to a small resealable plastic bag. Snip a small hole in corner of bag. Set both bag and bowl of chocolate aside.

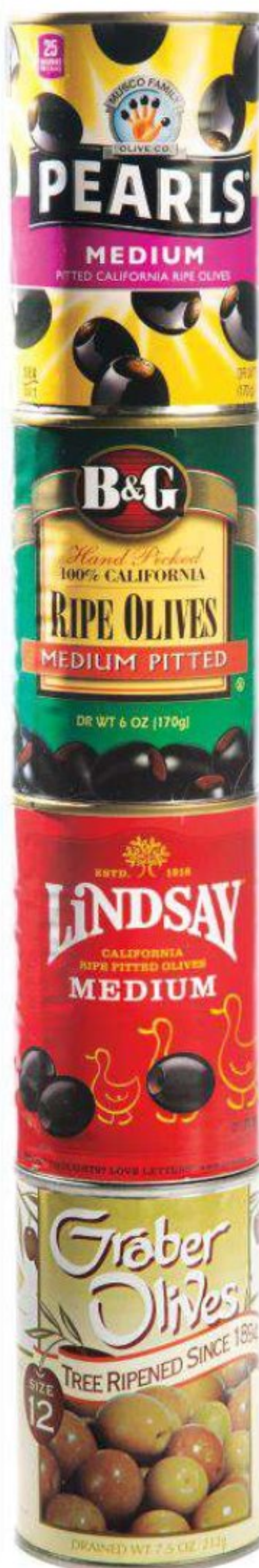
4 Remove baking sheets from refrigerator. Unmold cookie cutters and, using bag of chocolate, pipe a small ring on top of the 2¼" circle. Place the 4½" circle on top of smaller circle to make a pedestal. Pipe a ring of chocolate around top edge of pedestal; place one of the largest circles of leaves on top. Continue this process, stacking circles of leaves, from largest to smallest to make a tree. Glue the two free-form leaves together with a drop of chocolate; secure them standing up on top of smallest circle to make a pointed treetop.

5 Divide remaining chocolate between 2 bowls; stir red food coloring into one and green into the other. Transfer each to a small resealable plastic bag, and snip a small hole in one corner of each bag. Pipe dots and strings around tree to make Christmas decorations. Chill until set, about 1 hour.

TODD COLEMAN

Uncanny Flavor

How quickly we forget. That's what we were thinking in the SAVEUR test kitchen after we popped open several cans of black olives to make the onion and olive enchiladas and the beef brisket and picadillo-stuffed empanadas for this month's feature on the foods of California's Central Coast (see "California Eternal," page 66). While we might often eschew the tinned staples in favor of kalamatas and other pungent types, black California olives are the ones many of us grew up with. Our mothers served them in the relish tray at holiday meals or chopped them up and layered them over cream cheese for our sandwiches. They're the olives we would place on our fingertips, then bite off, one at a time. We loved their meaty texture and mild flavor.



Those same qualities, as we learned this month, make canned California olives work better than more artisanal types when it comes to dishes like empanadas and enchiladas; their texture adds substance to those foods, and their mellow taste allows other ingredients' flavors to shine through.

Why are these olives so different from others? It has to do with the way they're processed. Most California olives are picked firm and green, then ripened in a lye cure that leaches out their bitterness. Then they're oxidized to a uniform blackness before they're canned. Of course, some California olives aren't so dark and mild. Long a staple of California kitchens, Graber-brand olives are fully tree-ripened before curing in sealed vats to prevent oxidization. Mottled red-dish-gold in color, pit-in Grabers are more tender and nuttier-tasting than their ebony kin. And take our word for it, they're just as equally addictive.

—Justin Kennedy

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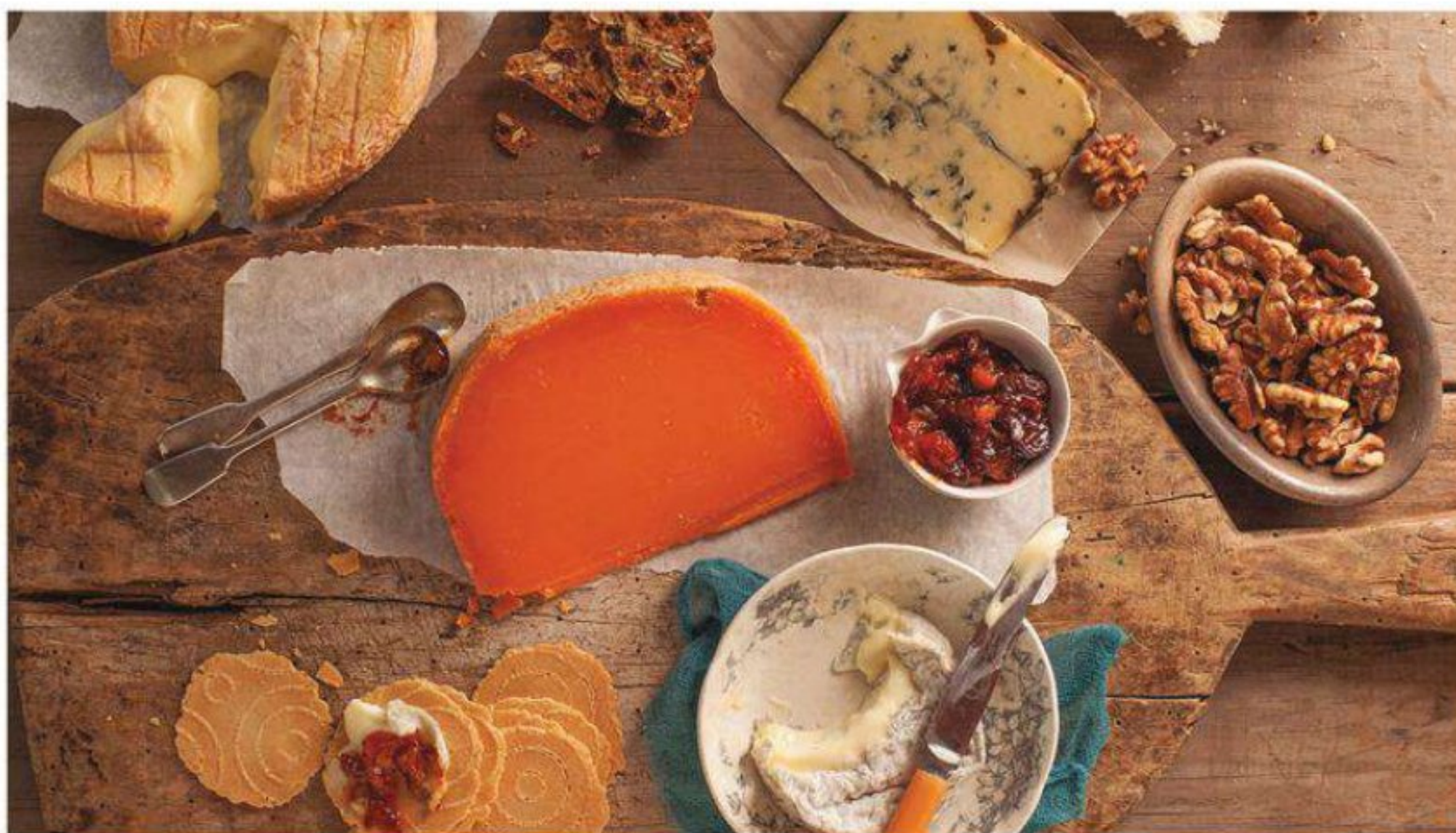
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CHEESE PLEASE



Clockwise From Top Left: Hervé Mons St. Soleil; Rogue Creamery Rogue River Blue; Vermont Creamery Bonne Bouche; Isigny Sainte Mère Mimolette

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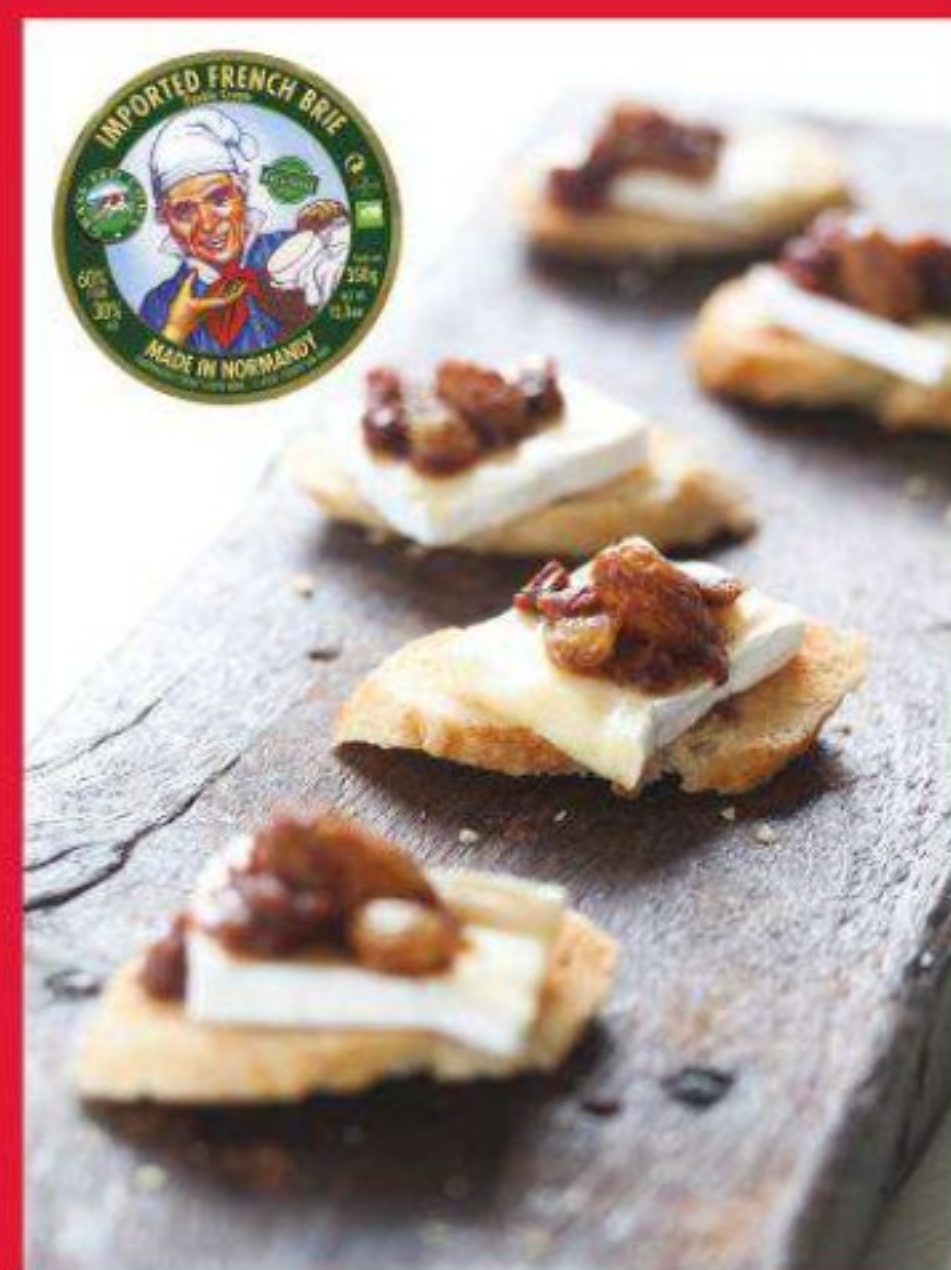
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THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

In producing the stories for this issue, we discovered ingredients and information too good to keep to ourselves. Please feel free to raid our pantry!

BY KELLIE EVANS

Fare

For more information on **East Baltimore Christmas** (see [page 15](#)), contact the Polish Home Club (410/276-0636; polishcommunity.com). To make the Persian trail mix (see [page 18](#)), purchase sugar-coated slivered almonds, or **noghl**, available from Sadaf.com (\$6.69 for a 10-ounce package; 800/852-4050; sadaf.com), and **dried mulberries**, available from Puritan's Pride (\$8.99 for a 7-ounce package; 800/645-1030; puritan.com).

Essay

To prepare the shrimp fritters (see [page 25](#)), use **chickpea flour**, available from Nuts.com (\$2.99 for a 1-pound bag; 800/558-6887; nuts.com).

Ingredient

For our favorite brands of **white chocolate** (see [page 41](#)), purchase Valrhona Ivoire, available from Surfas Culinary District (\$28.73 for a 2-pound bag; 877/641-2661; culinarydistrict.com); Perugina White Chocolate, available from Chocolat Boutique (\$3.99 for a 3.5-ounce bar; 803/802-9980; chocolateboutique.com); Felchlin Mont Blanc Couverture, available from Chocosphere (\$22.25 for a 2.2-pound box; 877/992-4626; chocosphere.com); E. Guittard High Sierra, available from World Wide Chocolate (\$64.60 for a 10-pound block; 800/664-9410; worldwidechocolate.com); Vintage Plantations 33% White Chocolate Blocks, available from Vintage Plantations (\$21 for a 2.2-pound bar; see above); Davao White Chocolate, available from Askinosie Chocolate (\$10.50 for a 3-ounce bar; 417/862-9900; askinosie.com); El Rey Icoa, available from Chocolates El Ray, Inc. (\$15.39 for a 2.2-pound block; 800/357-3999; chocolates-elrey.com); Cacao Barry's Zephyr, available from Heineman (\$79.31 for an 11-pound box; 877/238-6486; jheineman.com); White Chocolate Baking Bar, available from Ghirardelli (\$3.95 for a 4-ounce bar; 888/402-6262; ghirardelli.com); and Classic Recipe White Chocolate, available from Lindt (\$3.85 for a 4.4-ounce bar; 877/695-4638; lindtusa.com).



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Bavarian Christmas

To prepare traditional German pretzels (see [page 62](#)), purchase **barley malt syrup**, available from Shop Organic (\$7.49 for a 20-ounce jar; 520/792-0804; shoporganic.com). To make the macerated fruit conserve (see [page 62](#)), use **pitted sour cherries**, available from Amazon (\$4.99 for a 14.5-ounce jar; amazon.com). To prepare chocolate-glazed almond spice cookies (see [page 64](#)), buy **back oblaten wafers**, available from Bavaria Sausage, Inc. (\$3.79 for a box of 70mm wafers; 800/733-6695; bavariasausage.com).

Australian Sunday Roast

To make roast leg of lamb with apples and fennel (see [page 81](#)), buy **pomegranate molasses**, available from Market Hall Foods (\$7 for a 12-ounce jar; 888/952.4005; markethallfoods.com).

California Ranch

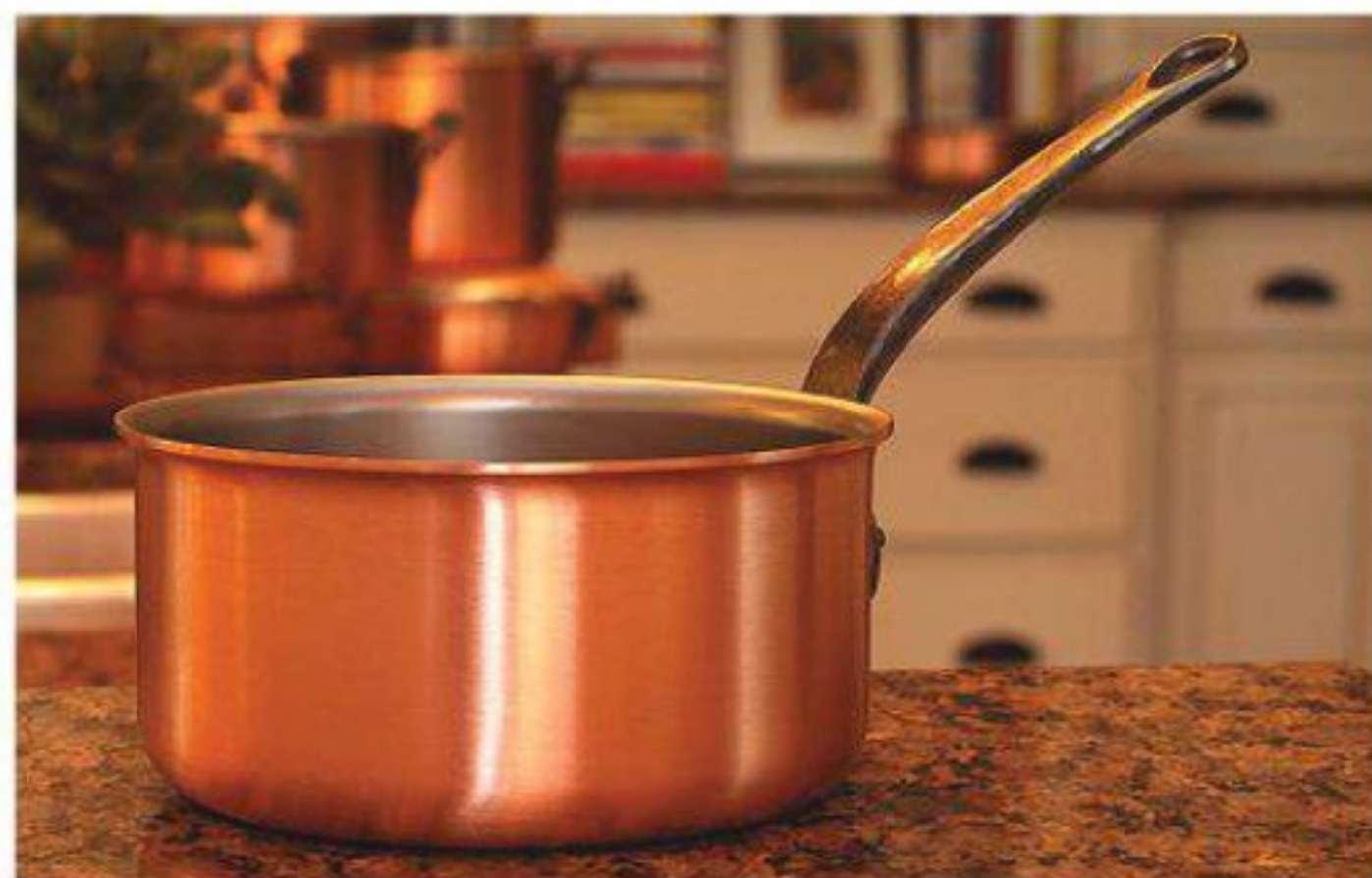
To prepare onion and olive enchiladas (see [page 77](#)), use **Anaheim** (look for "Organic New Mexico Chiles") and **pasilla chiles**, available from Marx Foods (\$19 for a 2-ounce bag of Anaheim and \$23 for a 4-ounce bag of pasilla; 866/588-6279; marxfoods.com); **cotija cheese**, available from MexGrocer (\$7.95 for 10 ounces; 877/463-9476; mexgrocer.com); and **canned black olives** (see Kitchen, below).

Kitchen

To prepare the grated daikon and ginger sauce (see [page 84](#)), purchase **kombu**, available from Swanson Health Products (\$8.73 for 2.1-ounce pack; 800/824-4491; swansonvitamins.com), and **dried bonito flakes**, available from Amazon (\$14.80 for a 3.52-ounce pack; see above). To make matcha green tea salt (see [page 84](#)), use **matcha green tea powder**, available from Nuts.com (\$18.99 for an 8-ounce bag; 800/558-6887; nuts.com). For our favorite brands of **canned black olives** (see [page 89](#)), purchase Pearls, available from Amazon (\$2.26 for a 6-ounce can; see above); B&G, available from Buythecase (\$33.48 for twelve 6-ounce cans; 781/834-6560; buythecase.net); Lindsay, available from ShopFoodEx (\$2.89 for 6-ounce can; 800/990-6398; shopfoodex.com); and Graber, available from Amazon (\$11.99 for a 7.5-ounce can; see above).

CORRECTION: In the map that ran with "Cassava Nation" (November 2012), Guatemala was mislabeled as Mexico. We regret the error.

SAVEUR (ISSN 1075-7864) Issue: No. 152, December 2012. SAVEUR is published nine times per year (January/February, March, April, May, June/July, August/September, October, November, and December) by Bonnier Corporation, 460 N. Orlando Ave., Suite 200, Winter Park, FL 32789. Copyright 2012, all rights reserved. The contents of this publication may not be reproduced in whole or in part without consent of the copyright owner. Periodicals postage paid at Winter Park, Fla., and additional mailing offices. SUBSCRIPTIONS: U.S., \$29.95 for one year, \$49.95 for two years. Foreign surface mail to Canada: \$42.95 for one year; to other foreign destinations: \$55.95. For subscription information, please call 386/447-2592. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to SAVEUR, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. For faster service, please enclose your current subscription label. EDITORIAL: Send correspondence to Editorial Department, SAVEUR, 15 East 32nd Street, 12th Floor, New York, NY 10016; e-mail: edit@saveur.com. We welcome all editorial submissions but assume no responsibility for the loss or damage of unsolicited material. Retail sales discounts are available; contact Circulation Department. The following are trademarks of SAVEUR and Bonnier Corporation, and their use by others is strictly prohibited: IN THE SAVEUR KITCHEN, SAVEUR FARE, SAVEUR MOMENT.



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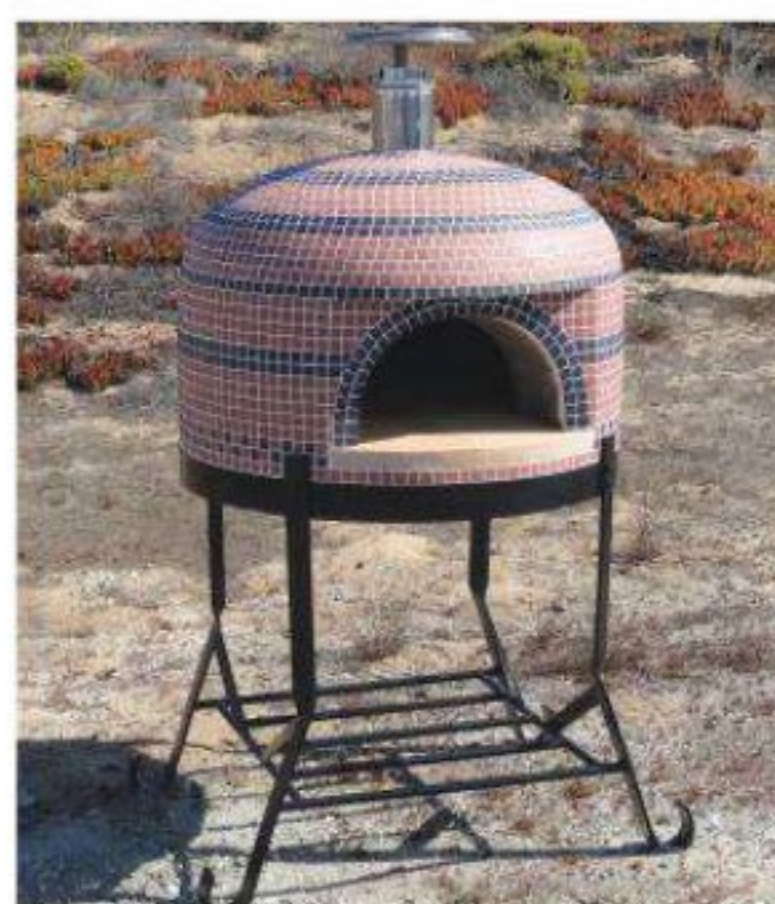


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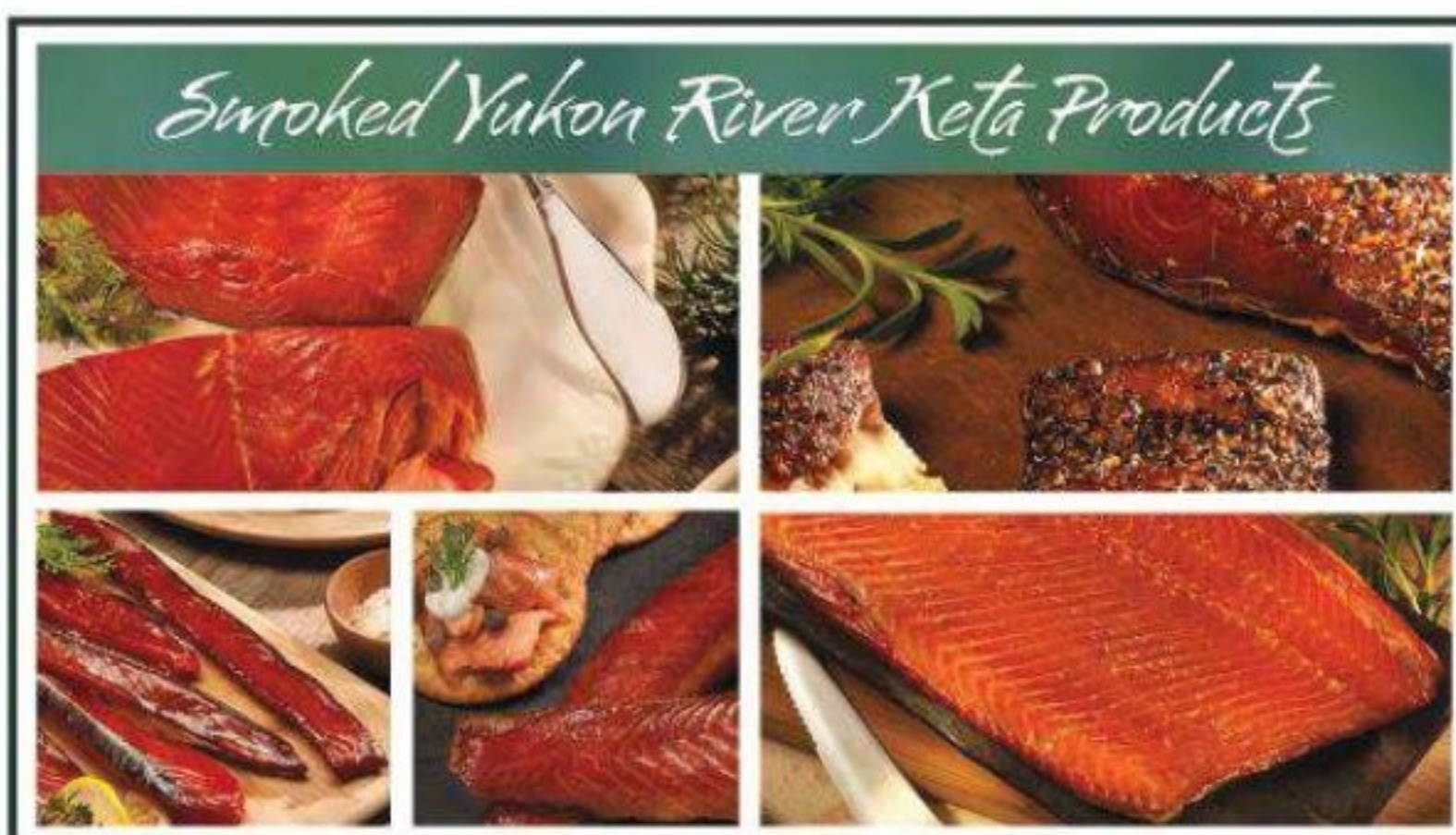
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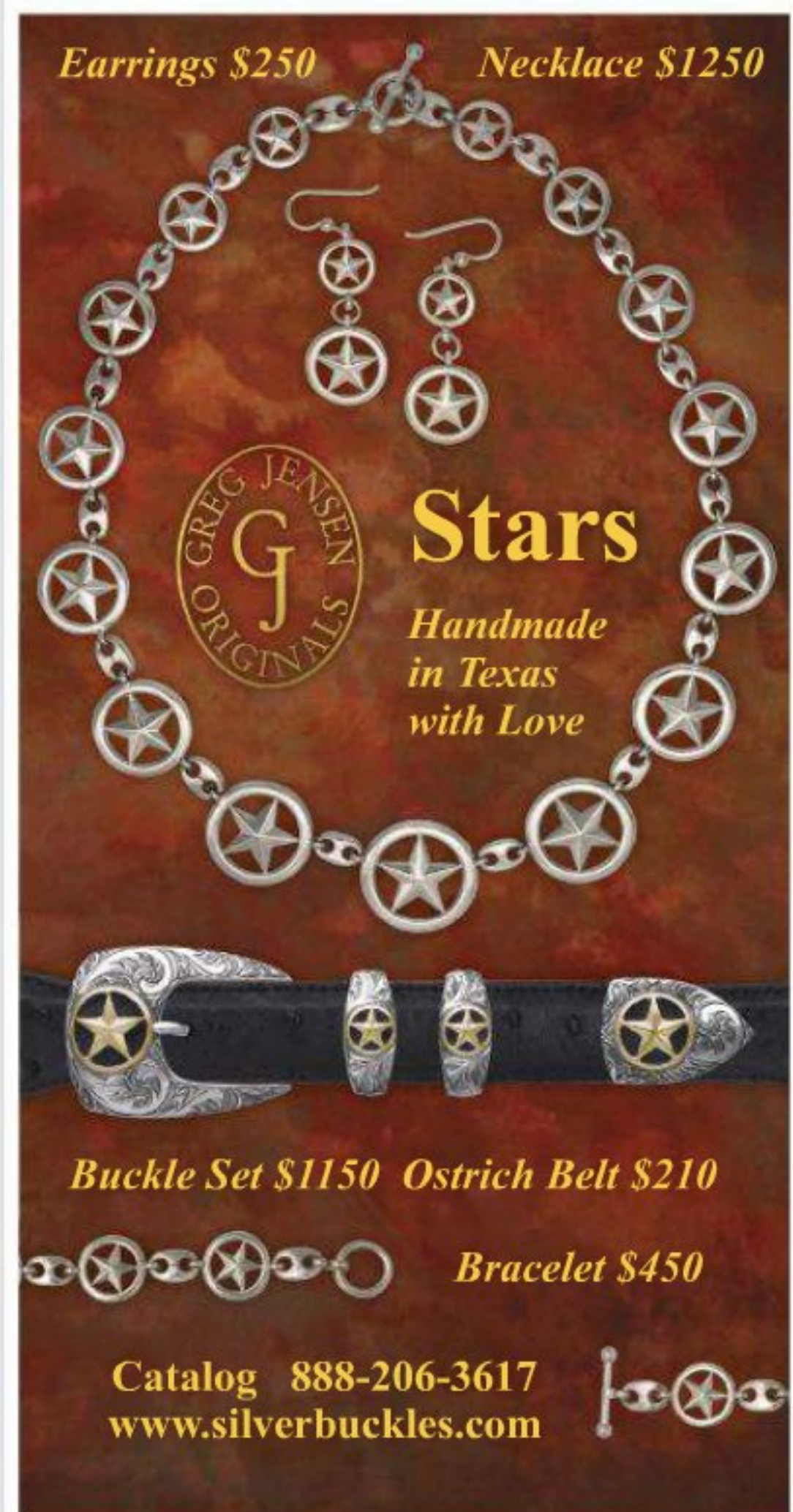
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